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SAVAGE MESSIAH



THE SHOCKING STORY OF CULT LEADER ROCK THÉRIAULT AND THE WOMEN WHO LOVED HIM

PAUL KAIHLA and ROSS LAVER

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The Shocking Story of Cult Leader Rock Thériault and the Women Who Loved Him

PAUL KAIHLA and ROSS LAVER



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McClelland-Bantam, Inc.
Toronto

To our families

This edition contains the complete text of the original hardcover edition.
NOT ONE WORD HAS BEEN OMITTED.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Truth, the saying goes, is stranger than fiction. Few real-life dramas demonstrate the wisdom of that aphorism better than the strange and terrible odyssey of Rock Thériault. As we attempted to fathom the complex mind and dark activities of this diabolical genius, we were repeatedly shocked by the depravity of the world he fashioned for himself and his followers. Most chilling of all, we had to keep reminding ourselves that these events were not the creation of some pulp novelist's warped imagination.

At a time when destructive cults are once again in the public spotlight, the history of Rock Thériault's group offers a case study in the extremes of human dominance and dependency. We hope this book will serve as a cautionary tale to those who might otherwise fall prey to the seductive charms of a self-styled prophet—and also to law enforcement officials and child protection authorities.

What you are about to read may fill you with horror. Many people, presumably beginning with Rock himself, would prefer that the full litany of these atrocities remain shrouded in secrecy. But as journalists we felt it was in the public interest to provide a complete account of his life and crimes. Part of our mission was to bring to light events that had never been fully disclosed in court and were therefore known only to a handful of investigators and court officials. The fact that Rock maintains a hold over some of his followers to this day only

underscores the need to create greater public awareness.

Having said that, this book would not have been possible without the generous assistance of many people. Among the more than 150 sources in three provinces and two states, we especially want to thank those members of Rock's entourage who had the strength and courage to share their experiences. Of the nine surviving adult members of his second commune, six gave generously of their time. We also wish to express our deep gratitude to the relatives of several commune members, including Gisèle Martineau, Gisèle Laflamme and Victoria Labrie.

Of equal importance was the cooperation of the Ontario Provincial Police—in particular, Detective Constable Bob Bowen of the Coboconk detachment and Detective Inspector Bob Adams of the force's Criminal Investigations Branch in Toronto.

Thanks are also due to Crown attorneys James Stewart and Rick Bagg; Dr. Andrew Malcolm; Dr. David Wolfe; Gordon Manktelow of the Simcoe County Department of Social Services; Georgia Brown and Robert Penny of the Kawartha-Haliburton Children's Aid Society; Betty-Jean Moyle; Douglas Devnich, Georges Hermans, Pierre Zita and Don Donesky of the Seventh-day Adventist Church; Alex, Joanna, Elizabeth and Diane Joseph of Big Water, Utah; Paul Forbes, assistant chief of police in Murray City, Utah; Eddy Auclair of Thetford Mines city council; genealogist Steven White of the Centre for Acadian Studies at the University of Moncton; and the helpful staff at the University of Toronto's Robarts Library, the Metro Toronto Reference Library and the Lindsay Public Library.

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Finally, a note about the names that appear in the text. Although the vast majority of them are authentic, we have taken measures to protect the

identities of some of Rock's victims. The surnames of Gisèle Tremblay and Marise Lambert are pseudonyms, as are the first names of all of the children born in the commune (except for Samuel and Eleazar, who are no longer alive). The names we have given to two peripheral figures, Jean-Marc Martin and Virginia McIntyre, are also fictitious.

The central figure in this book was baptized Roch Thériault, but switched to the spelling Rock after leading his followers out of Quebec. For simplicity, we have used the latter spelling throughout.

Paul Kaihla
Ross Laver
Toronto, July 1993

"Those who play at being angels end up as animals."

—Blaise Pascal

CHAPTER 1

GISÈLE'S SECRET



The central Ontario resort town of Orillia, on the narrows between Lake Simcoe and Lake Couchiching, is perhaps best known as Mariposa, the fictionalized setting of Stephen Leacock's 1912 comic novel *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town.* Today, Orillia retains much of its quaintness, but gone is the cheerful prosperity that characterized the place in Leacock's day. Its outskirts, once farmers' fields, are blighted by hamburger joints, pizza parlors and self-serve gas bars—the same kind of tacky franchise heaven that hovers at the edge of every two-bit town in North America. And like so many depressed communities, Orillia has succumbed to the car and the four-lane highway. Families that in earlier times might have done all of their shopping locally now hop in their mini-vans and make the hour-long drive south to the sprawling discount warehouses of suburban Toronto.

Down the street from the red brick Orillia Opera House, boarded-up shops and silent factories testify to the precarious local economy. Nearby, shabby clusters of Victorian houses are scattered carelessly along potholed roads. Shedding coats of old paint that look as if they were applied in Leacock's time,

the decrepit lodgings are now low-rent rooming houses for drifters, alcoholics and others to whom life has dealt a bad hand.

Gordon Manktelow knows those people well. In the summer of 1989, he was assigned to Orillia as a welfare caseworker for the Simcoe County Department of Social Services. A dapper, somewhat fidgety man with a tidy handlebar moustache and an eager-to-please smile, he approached his work as he approached everything in life: with an accountant's fastidiousness and a Boy Scout's sense of honor. Even in his late fifties, he rarely left for work in the morning without a five-kilometer jog, a habit he formed during his twenty-eight years in the Canadian military. His neighbors and friends might have privately poked fun at his regimen, but deep down they envied the fact that Manktelow had the body of a forty-year-old.

On the job, he displayed a similar level of near-obsessive dedication. When speaking about some of the less desirable characters in his caseload, Manktelow would sometimes become openly derisive, as though the cheques he was delivering to them had been written against his personal bank account. But more often than not he erred in the other direction, wheeling and dealing with the bean-counters in his own department to perform favors for his clients, even though many of them went unappreciated. It depended on the situation, he'd say. Some people were simply worth the extra effort; some were not. And regardless of what anybody else thought, Manktelow assured himself, he was nobody's fool.

On the morning of Friday, August 11, 1989, as he drove into Orillia from his home in a pleasant middle-class subdivision in the nearby city of Barrie, Manktelow was prepared for trouble. A day earlier,

following his regular Monday-to-Friday schedule, he'd stopped at a pay phone to call the Social Services headquarters in nearby Midhurst to pick up his messages. Among the half-a-dozen new applicants that day, one in particular stood out: Gisèle Tremblay, single, new in town, no money, no funds, see as soon as possible. The address was familiar: Manktelow recalled visiting the place many times before to look in on one of his longtime clients, a cranky old landlady who lived alone and drank like there was no tomorrow—as long as you put a cheque in her hands today.

It was warm and hazy as Manktelow parked his government-issue Ford Tempo in front of the two-storey, pitch-roofed house. As he reached down to switch off the radio and pull his keys out of the ignition, he wondered if the old woman would be in one of her moods—and whether Gisèle Tremblay would turn out to be just as difficult as her hostess. He knocked on the door, and waited impatiently on the porch. Soon enough, the landlady came and let him in. He stood just inside the living room as she bellowed upstairs for Gisèle to come down.

When she did, Manktelow was immediately struck by her.

She was petite, very slim, well groomed and quite attractive, with curly brown hair, hazel eyes and a shy, gentle smile that made her look as though she would fall to pieces if you touched her. The old woman, obviously impatient to collect her first week's rent, hung around like a bad smell. She cursed and complained, telling Manktelow that her young boarder was stupid, that she couldn't even speak English. But Manktelow sensed that behind Gisèle's fragile veneer lay an alert and active mind. "She came downstairs and she looked worried and frightened, just like a wild animal," he later re-

called. "So I made an extra effort to come over to her and put her at her ease, because the landlady was being very condescending."

Finally, Manktelow managed to coax the foul-mouthed old woman out of the room so that he could interview his new client in peace. He pulled a welfare application form out of his briefcase and sat down beside her. In broken French, the half-forgotten residue of a childhood spent in Quebec, he drew out the vital statistics of her life—her age (thirty-eight), her previous occupation (baker) and her place of birth (near Baie St. Paul, a small town on the north shore of the St. Lawrence River). "When she heard a bit of my bad accent, she warmed up right away, but she was still just so terrified," he said. "I'd only been a caseworker for a year at that point, but I'd seen a lot of abuse in the military. There's abuse in military families and there's abuse in the military itself. She really looked like someone who had been abused."

As she spoke, Manktelow studied Gisèle's face and body language carefully for clues to her story. "I asked her where she'd just come from and I could see the wheels turning in her mind—I could see she was uncomfortable. She said, well, she'd been working for a relative—a cousin or brother-in-law or something—and he had a bakery. She said she was single and she had no children. Anyway, we finally finished with the form and I assured her there'd be no problems as long as she'd been telling me the truth. I told her I'd try to have a cheque for her in twenty-four hours because I was going to treat it as an emergency."

As it turned out, Gisèle was not telling the truth —at least, not the whole truth.

Later that day, Manktelow stopped by the Midhurst office to submit the application and pick

up a cheque for one hundred and fifty dollars—enough, he figured, to tide his new client over for a week or two until she could begin drawing regular monthly benefits. But there was a hitch. When the woman in the computer room typed Gisèle Tremblay's name into the system, it flashed up on the screen as a duplicate. Someone with the same name and date of birth was already drawing welfare in Newmarket, a bedroom community north of Toronto. The clerk immediately slapped a hold on the cheque. "I had to go down and fight for it," Manktelow recalled with irritation. "I said to the computer operator, 'It's none of your business. That's my cheque for my client.' So she says, 'Well, I'll have to report it to my supervisor.' And I says, 'You do that, but in the meantime you give me my cheque.' And I beat it the hell out of there with that cheque before she could talk to the supervisor.' "

For all his determination, Manktelow still wasn't sure what he should do. On the one hand, he wasn't about to let himself be hoodwinked by some clever little scam artist, no matter how sweet and innocent she looked. On the other hand, something about her—the shell-shocked look in her eyes, the way she smiled faintly and tilted her head demurely to one side when she talked about her past—told him that she was in trouble and needed help.

He decided to test her. The next day, he skipped his morning jog and drove straight to the house. Sure enough, the crotchety landlady was waiting for him inside the door reeking of cheap booze and stale cigarettes. "The old gal was hanging around because she was smelling the money," he said. "I could see Gisèle was really nervous, so I suggested that we go out to the car." They climbed into the Tempo and drove towards the center of town. Finally, Manktelow pulled up in front of a diner, an old

mom and pop operation where they could have coffee and a quiet conversation.

They talked for a while, and Manktelow bought her a pack of Craven As. But Gisèle wasn't saying much. She accepted the cigarettes and coffee with excessive gratitude, as if Manktelow had just told her she'd won an all-expenses-paid trip to a five-star Caribbean resort. She never hesitated when asked a question, but her responses seemed incomplete.

Through it all, Gisèle never once brought up the subject of the welfare money. Even when Manktelow took her back to the house, she didn't ask when or if she would ever get a cheque. She was halfway up the stairs to the front door when Manktelow called her back and motioned to her to get in the car.

"Gisèle, there's something I meant to ask you," he said.

She looked at him anxiously, like a young girl who had done something wrong but still wasn't sure how much her parents knew.

"You were on welfare in Newmarket."

"Yes," she said without blinking.

"You got money in Newmarket."

"Yes."

"You don't have any left?"

"No."

Almost relieved, Gisèle quickly explained that she'd been in a women's shelter there, and had needed the money to rent a room and live on her own. She had applied for a job as a live-in housekeeper for a young couple in town, but before she moved in the wife had second thoughts because, she had seemed to imply, Gisèle was a bit too cute, and she wasn't sure if she could trust her husband. Not wanting to cause trouble, Gisèle caught the next bus out of town.

"She told me this and she was very unemotional, very flat," Manktelow recalled. "She wasn't making excuses. It was decision time for me. So I decided that I believed her and I handed over the cheque. Then I drove her around to the National Trust, where I have an account, and got it cashed. On our way back to the house, I told her to keep the money hidden because the old woman was looking thirsty, and she was sure to go looking for it when Gisèle fell asleep."

By the end of that week, Manktelow had found Gisèle a new place to live—a bachelor apartment in a one-storey clapboard addition tacked on to the back of an old brick house a few blocks away. On moving day, he drove up to Orillia in his own vehicle, a Nissan pickup truck, and helped her settle into her new place. He didn't have to do it—he wanted to.

It was at about that time, Manktelow would say later, that all hell broke loose.

One afternoon, a fellow caseworker tracked him down while he was making his rounds. He told Manktelow to call the office right away—there seemed to be some kind of emergency. Manktelow stopped at the nearest pay phone, fished in his pockets for a quarter and dialed the dispatcher. There was an urgent message from the welfare office in Lindsay, a mid-sized town an hour's drive to the southeast. They wanted him to call the Kawartha-Haliburton Children's Aid Society office in that community.

Manktelow placed the call and was stunned by what he heard.

"It turned out that Gisèle was on the wanted list and it had something to do with a cult," he said later. "They were thinking that different cult members had fanned out to find the best places to hide.

They were looking for a man especially, and there was a Canada-wide warrant out for him. They knew that Gisèle was his wife, and they figured that if they found her, they'd track him, too. The story was that this guy had just chopped off some woman's arm with an ax."



If Gord Manktelow had a soft spot for those who were down on their luck, it was perhaps because he had once been down on his. Nine years earlier, he had retired from the military after twenty-eight years. A dutiful soldier who had been recognized for his bravery on the front lines in Korea, he had slowly worked his way up the ranks from lieutenant corporal to captain in the administrative branch of the Armed Forces Medical Services. But as soon as he got out of uniform, things started to go wrong.

It was the middle of a recession. Unable to find steady employment, Manktelow sank into a deep depression. For several years, he knocked around from one dead-end job to another, even spending time as an attendant in a local car wash. The strain on his self-esteem eventually destroyed his marriage. "We still live under the same roof, but that's all there is," he said. "She does her thing and I do mine."

One of the things Manktelow did was start a self-help center for people like him who were out of work. The members of the group would meet regularly to share advice on how to find jobs, and to lean on each other for support. His efforts eventually came to the attention of the Simcoe County Department of Social Services, and he wound up being hired as a counselor and welfare caseworker.

Suddenly, Manktelow felt he had a new mission in life. In the forces, his buddies had always said

that he wasn't cut out for the military; he was too sensitive. His friends in civilian life said that at heart he was still an army man. With his distinguished thatch of grey hair, meticulously groomed moustache and fondness for silk ascots and tweed jackets, he looked like a straitlaced British colonel doing his best to unwind during a weekend in the country.

Manktelow liked to think of himself as a tough guy. But as he stood there in the phone booth on the side of the road, discussing Gisèle's personal history with the Children's Aid Society worker in Lindsay, he felt sick to his stomach. He jotted down the name and telephone number of the man who was leading the investigation, Constable Bob Bowen of the Ontario Province Police detachment in Coboconk, a backwater forty-one kilometers north of Lindsay.

Manktelow got Bowen on the phone and introduced himself. Practically tripping over his words, he recounted how he had come into contact with Gisèle Tremblay and helped her find a new place to live.

Bowen wanted to know if anybody else knew where Gisèle was staying.

"Well, just you, me and Children's Aid," Manktelow responded. "I haven't talked to anyone in my office about her, and in light of this I'm not going to."

Briefly, Bowen sketched the essentials of the case as he knew them. It turned out that Gisèle had been living on a commune on a remote patch of wilderness east of Coboconk, with several other women, a couple of men and a bearded Frenchman they called Moses. His real name was Rock Thériault. A week earlier, one of the other commune women had shown up at the emergency department of a hospi-

tal in Newmarket, missing an arm. Since then, the police had been combing the bush for Thériault, but no one knew where he was.

"We talked and Bob was all hot to trot to come and get Gisèle. I said, 'Well, Bob, if you come down I think she'll be gone. You're going to lose her as a witness.' He said I was probably right, and what could we do? I said, 'I've got her in a safe house now —nobody knows who she is.' He sort of relaxed and said, 'Okay, when we're ready we'll make an arrangement. In the meantime, keep talking to Gisèle and see what you can get out of her.' "



Manktelow couldn't wait to see Gisèle again. He drove to her apartment, jabbed at the doorbell and fidgeted uneasily while waiting for her to open the door. He was trying to figure out how to break the news to her.

"Gisèle, we have to talk," he said gravely when she finally appeared.

She invited him in and they sat down cross-legged on the mustard-yellow shag carpet. The only furniture in the wood-paneled room was a small dresser and a six-inch slab of foam that sufficed as a bed.

Studying her face to gauge her reaction, he repeated what he had learned that day from Bowen. He was expecting her to be shocked, but he was wrong. "I told her about that woman's arm being cut off, and she just said, 'Yes,' in a matter-of-fact kind of way. It was like, 'So what?' That's when I realized that she'd known about it all along."

From that day on, Manktelow threw himself into the case—and Gisèle's life—with renewed force. He'd already found her a job as an assembly-line worker in a local factory, where she proved to be a diligent, hardworking employee. Although she was

no longer drawing welfare, he continued to see her three or four times a week, often picking her up after work and driving her home or to a nearby restaurant, where they would sit and talk for hours. At other times, they wandered down to the lake and spent the evening gazing at the water, engrossed in conversation, as the sun set behind them.

Once, Manktelow was thumbing through the newspaper when he came across an ad for a discount bedding shop. He hopped into his Nissan pickup and headed for the store. "I wheeled and dealed and picked up a single bed for seventy-nine dollars or something ridiculous like that. I can still remember the look on Gisèle's face when I rolled up with it—you know, *Uh oh, it's deal-making time.* It was the first time in her adult life she'd had her own bed, and I'm sure she was thinking it came at a price."

Bit by bit, Gisèle opened up. She told how she had met Thériault years earlier in Quebec City, how they had lived together with a number of other young men and women in Thetford Mines, east of Montreal, and how Thériault had gradually convinced them that he was some kind of messiah. At first, Rock was every woman's dream—charming, worldly and intelligent, the kind of man who loved nature and would never hurt a fly. He seemed to know everything about every subject, and could hold you spellbound for hours while he preached his personal interpretations of the Bible.

But there was also a dark side to this man they worshipped as Moses. After leading his followers into the wilderness, he had taken eight women to be his brides and forced them to take part in wild, drunken orgies. When he was angry, he punished his sex slaves with the force of a wrathful god—attacking them with whips, axes, even welding

torches. Gisèle didn't like to talk much about those episodes. She was obviously still terrified. To her, Thériault seemed omnipotent. Deep down, she even doubted that the police would ever succeed in arresting someone so powerful.

"I would just let her talk," Manktelow recalled. "She was having recurring nightmares. Every night, Thériault would catch her and shoot her with a rifle or go after her with a knife. She'd run away, but someone would always come and take her back."

And yet the more they talked, the more Manktelow became convinced that Gisèle was hiding something. He gradually put pressure on her, saying that for the sake of her own sanity she had to get everything out in the open, to free herself of her torment. But he took care not to push too hard. If he went too far, he figured, she could easily disappear —and find her way back to Thériault. It was important to build up her confidence. Only then would she feel strong enough to confront whatever secrets lay buried inside her. For weeks, he patiently reassured and comforted Gisèle, while exhorting her to tell the whole truth.

The long-awaited breakthrough came during the first week of October.

Gisèle told Manktelow that she had something "very, very bad" to tell him, and that he should meet her after work at 3 p.m. on Friday, the start of the Thanksgiving weekend. On the appointed day, he picked her up at the factory. After stopping to get a bucket of Kentucky Fried Chicken and a bottle of red wine, they drove to the apartment.

Once again, they sat on the floor facing each other and began to talk. Gisèle seemed drained of emotion, as though she had deliberately severed the connections between her brain and her heart. Even so, the memories came rushing forth: vivid descrip-

tions of dark rituals and blood-soaked acts that made Manktelow's skin crawl. "She started and I was there until eleven at night. When she started, she couldn't stop. It was real violent and morbid—the understanding was that there were no holds barred."

When it was all over, Manktelow felt punch-drunk. "Gisèle," he inquired weakly, "is it okay if I go home now?" They embraced and he left.

Years later, he would still say that the drive home that night was the worst of his life. As his car sped along the highway, past gas stations and all-night coffee shops, he couldn't clear his head of Gisèle's horror stories. Above all, he wondered how the others could have stood by silently while Moses had sentenced a beautiful young woman to die.

CHAPTER 2

LITTLE GIRL IN THE ATTIC



In the 1950s, before the period of social and political upheaval known as the Quiet Revolution, French Canada was still a cloistered, hierarchical society, ruled like a feudal state by the Roman Catholic church and an authoritarian provincial government. A pocket of French-speaking citizens trapped by historical accident on an English continent, Quebec was essentially a remnant of pre-revolutionary France. In contrast to the rest of North America, there was little meaningful separation of church and state. The fear of assimilation fostered a siege mentality that pre-empted any move toward democratic reform. It was understood that the interests of the collective overrode the well-being of the individual. "The legislature of Quebec is a fortress that we must defend without failing," thundered Maurice Duplessis, the autocratic premier who governed the province from 1944 to 1960. "It is that which permits us to construct the schools which suit us, to speak our language, to practice our religion and to make laws applicable to our population."

Duplessis' government maintained an iron grip on power, extorting money from nearly every business in the province and using the provincial police force to smash unions, quash demonstrations and rough up opposition politicians. On election day, the party machine shamelessly bought votes and stuffed ballot boxes. For the most part, the religious establishment offered uncritical support; in exchange, the government funneled generous subsidies into Catholic schools, hospitals and other agencies. Particularly in small towns and rural areas, the word of the local priest was law.

As the 1950s progressed, Quebec experienced a profound economic transformation. Duplessis was a tireless supporter of private enterprise, and threw open the doors to an infusion of foreign investment. With the United States providing a vast and hungry market for lumber, minerals and hydro-electric power, the government launched a massive highway and bridge construction program. As a result, vast new areas of the province were opened up for resource development. Along the north shore of the St. Lawrence River and in the Saguenay Valley, tens of thousands of families began to enjoy relative prosperity, as money flooded into the region and construction jobs abounded. Often the man of the house was absent for weeks or months at a stretch, living in work camps in the northern wilderness.

Born into one of those families on March 16, 1951, was a baby girl, the fifth child of seven brought up in a white, two-storey clapboard house in the rustic village of St. Joseph-de-la-Rive, ten kilometers upriver from Baie St. Paul in the county of Charlevoix. For a young girl with a playful imagination and a wide-eyed affection for the wonders of nature, it was an idyllic setting. In the summer, there were long, frolicking walks across the lush

surrounding countryside, through fields of wild flowers and forests soaked in the fragrance of pine and cedar. In the winter, soft, billowy dunes of snow created a glistening tableau of white that stretched back to the rounded peaks of the mountains that marched across the northern horizon.

Gisèle Tremblay's earliest memories are similar in many ways to those of most rural Quebecers—a childhood filled with sleigh rides, skating parties, maple syrup festivals and picnics on long, lazy July afternoons in meadows bathed in sunlight.

Unfortunately, life at home was not nearly so agreeable.

Gisèle never saw the place where her father worked, but she knew it was a long way away, somewhere up north where herds of caribou roamed and gangs of men labored with huge, noisy machines that belched black smoke. They were damming the rivers and flooding the forests to create vast new lakes. Papa was a diesel mechanic in Manicouagan, where the roads ended and the uncharted northern wilderness began. He would leave home for six or seven months at a time, to work on the massive new hydro stations that would someday feed electricity to the homes and factories of Quebec and New York State.

Perhaps because she saw him so seldom, Gisèle worshipped Papa above all else. She'd tell her friends in school that she didn't really know him that well. But in her eyes, he could do no wrong—nobody could touch him. She lived for that moment when Papa would come through the door, laden with candy and bursting with exotic stories about his adventures deep in the bush. And nothing on earth could surpass the joy she felt when he would settle into his big rocking chair and gather Gisèle up in his big, muscular arms. It seemed like they

would sit there for hours, rocking gently back and forth on the pine floor and staring into a blazing fire. Years later, she still remembered those evenings vividly. "I sit in my father's lap," she said wistfully in her fractured English, "and he have the rocking chair, and he rock me all the time, all the time, all the time. Nobody can make me feel that safe."

If only things were always so good. For when Papa was away, the Tremblay household was anything but happy. Perhaps Gisèle's mother was depressed and resentful because she felt that her husband didn't love her. In all her years at home, Gisèle never once saw her parents kiss or embrace; they seemed incapable of spending more than a few hours together without bickering and fighting. Or perhaps Mama simply couldn't cope with the burden of raising seven children on her own in a provincial backwater one hundred kilometers from the nearest city. For in a village like St. Joseph-de-la-Rive, there was precious little that a lonely married woman could do for enjoyment that would escape the unyielding scrutiny of the local gossips and pursed-lipped churchgoers.

Regardless of the reason, Madame Tremblay was not exactly the model of an attentive, loving parent. There was never any physical affection for her children. "My mother, she's not good with me. She never look after the children," Gisèle said. "She don't exactly hurt me too much, but I don't learn a thing about life from her. And if I need help, she's not like a mother to me—not like, 'Oh, come here baby and I'll protect you.' " In fact, it was Gisèle who sometimes found herself in the role of protector. She recalls throwing herself on top of her older sister, Josephine, on several occasions to shield her

from the blows when Mama, wielding a black leather strap, came after her for staying out late.

Gisèle was seven when she started school, but she usually made it to class only three days a week. On other days, her mother put her to work cleaning the house, doing the laundry and looking after her two younger brothers, Guy, who was five when Gisèle began school, and baby Maurice. "I was the little mother," Gisèle said, looking back on those years. "I look after my mother, I look after the house, I look after everything. She liked to leave the house upside down." On Sundays, Gisèle's mother would prepare a family lunch. But the rest of the time, the children had to feed themselves, finding whatever they could in the refrigerator.

While Gisèle cleaned house, her mother went out. She seemed to prefer being anywhere but home. Sometimes, Madame Tremblay would explain to her children that she was visiting friends. Most often, she didn't tell them anything. She simply grabbed her coat and walked out, leaving the children in the care of the elderly woman next door. Gisèle called the neighbor *grandmère.* Her real grandparents were dead.

By the time Gisèle was nine, her three older brothers and Josephine had left home to fend for themselves. Meanwhile, *grandmère* next door was ailing and was barely capable of taking care of herself, let alone the Tremblay kids. Undeterred, Gisèle's mother would hustle the three young children up the stairs and into a windowless attic whenever she was ready to go out. As she climbed back down, she would reach up and grab the handle of a trapdoor, yanking it shut and locking them in with a sliding steel bolt.

While their mother's footsteps echoed from below, Guy and Maurice nuzzled their young faces

against the dusty grill in the floor overlooking the kitchen to catch a glimpse of her as she scurried out. "I remember my brother Maurice, he was so young at the time, he cried, 'Mama, mama, come back, mama.' And I consoled him, 'No, no, it's okay, Gisèle is here.' She would be gone for hours and we were scared. It was like that for years."

The only time that things seemed to be near normal in the Tremblay residence was when Papa returned home for his twice-yearly visits. Gisèle's mother would stay in the house and act out the role of dutiful wife and mother. She shopped for groceries, kept the house spick-and-span and cooked all the meals. Papa apparently never caught on that it was all a charade. Gisèle said nothing, but inside she burned with resentment. She swore that if she ever found a husband, she would be the most devoted wife a man could hope for. She'd be everything her mother was not—loyal, loving and attentive.

Her father, the person she adored and trusted more than anyone on earth, reinforced that feeling. After arguing with his wife, he would take Gisèle aside, shake his head and lament the state of his marriage. He told her that if she didn't want to wind up in an equally unhappy relationship, she would have to learn to obey her partner. "He always said to me, 'Gisèle, when you get married you must follow your husband, even if he wants to move to a new country. No matter what happens, you stay by his side.' " She took the words to heart.

As a young girl, Gisèle loved going to school. But as the years went by, she began to challenge the authority of the Catholic nuns who ran the school and taught all the classes. She resented the way they would boss her around the whole time and make her feel like a bad girl. Cold and domineering,

they reminded Gisèle of her own mother. She hated them.

In Grade Six, she quit school.

When Gisèle's father found out, he hopped on a bus and traveled the five hundred kilometers from Manicouagan to St. Joseph-de-la-Rive—and Papa's little girl was back in the classroom the very next day. She continued her studies for four more years in nearby Baie St. Paul. Although she liked algebra and physics, her favorite subject was art. She loved to paint and make crafts. Her closest friend was a female teacher nine years her senior, who invited her to her home many times for drinks—scotch, beer, anything at all. They laughed and told stories late into the night, but Gisèle was too embarrassed to talk much about her home life. "I never talked about my problems with anybody. I didn't want anybody to know about my family—it was humiliating. I didn't think anyone could help me, so I just took the hurt." It was to become an all-too-familiar refrain in her life.

The older Gisèle got, the worse things became at home. Madame Tremblay would fly off the handle at the slightest provocation. And nothing could get her more riled up than the subject of money. All those years, Papa had been mailing her a cheque every two weeks, money that was supposed to pay the household bills and buy food and clothing for the family. But according to her daughter, Mama squandered most of the cash, spoiling herself with fancy clothes and extravagant gifts. Gisèle liked to say that her mother never bought one pair of shoes when two or three would do. Most of all, Mama liked to get dressed up and catch the train to Quebec City or Montreal, where she could sample the cosmopolitan delights of the big city.

Finally, when Gisèle was seventeen and ap-

proaching the end of Grade Ten, Papa discovered that a big chunk of his hard-earned money was going down the drain. Home for a visit, he told Gisèle that from then on he was going to mail the cheques straight to her. It would be her job to pay the bills and look after the household budget, doling out to her mother only enough cash each week to cover the necessities.

Mama hit the roof. There was no way that she was going to let her daughter tell her what she could and could not do with the money that, as far as she was concerned, was rightly hers. She marched straight out of the house and came back a couple of hours later with a suitcase, threw it down on Gisèle's bed and glared at her. "She just say, 'It's you or me. If you don't go, I go.' "

Gisèle lay in bed crying all that night. She was scared. She wasn't ready for the world. But the last thing she wanted to do was come between her parents so, as soon as she finished the school year, she began making plans to move out. By September, she'd found herself a room in Quebec City and a job as a salesclerk behind the lingerie counter of a local department store.

"I had a really hard time," Gisèle recalled. "I earned forty-five bucks a week, and twenty-five of that went to pay for the room. I didn't have the money to buy clothes so I got credit cards and filled them up. I didn't know anything at that time. I had my own little stove, but I didn't have the money to buy a lot of food, so most of the time I just ate bread and butter. I was lonely. I started to drink at home."

At a dance one night in 1969, a year after moving to the Quebec capital, Gisèle met a man. At twenty-eight, Robert was ten years her senior. Looking back now, Gisèle finds it hard to believe that she ever fell for him. But at the time, the whole thing made per-

fect sense. She was an impressionable young woman from a small village and Robert was a handsome, smooth-talking charmer who knew his way around town. He seemed like the kind of guy who would take you under his wing and give you shelter. "I guess I was looking for my dad," Gisèle recalled ruefully. "I always liked men who were older than me. I was just like a little girl. I believed everything."

It didn't take long for Gisèle to discover a less desirable side to Robert, however. He was a boozer. He would crawl out of bed in the morning, bleary-eyed and cursing everything that moved, and crack open the first of many bottles of beer to chase away the demons from the previous night's drinking. All day long he'd sit in front of the TV watching game shows and soap operas while Gisèle went off to work. By the time she got home, he'd be into the hard stuff.

Robert was also the kind of guy who believed in sharing. Everything he had was hers, which wasn't saying much because he seemed to have an allergic reaction to work. Everything she had, starting with her pay, he took.

Before long, Robert's constant drinking started to rub off on Gisèle. Around someone like him, what else was there to do? Beer and wine were her beverages of choice at the beginning, but after a while she took up his habit of mixing pure grain alcohol with 7-Up. For two people on a tight budget, it was just about the cheapest way to get drunk.

One Sunday afternoon, Gisèle felt a sharp pain in her stomach. She tried to go to work the next morning, but she was covered in sweat and in so much agony that she could hardly stand up. Robert took her to the hospital. "Five minutes later, I'm on the table and they're doing surgery," she recalled. "And

when they open me up, they see the intestines are burned. One of them said to me, 'Gisèle, if you go on like this you will say bye-bye to your life.' " She didn't take another drink for two years.

In 1972, Robert talked Gisèle into moving to Montreal. They got an apartment in St. Léonard, a working-class, predominantly Italian neighborhood. Gisèle started working as a checkout girl at the local Dominion store. The job was okay, but Montreal was another story. She hadn't minded Quebec City, with its horse-drawn *calèches* and narrow cobblestone streets. But for a girl from the country, Montreal was too big, too crowded and too impersonal. She felt as though she couldn't breathe.

Life with Robert was becoming more unbearable by the day. He'd fallen in with a bad crowd. Gisèle heard later that they were holding up banks, but at the time all she knew was that her boyfriend would disappear for a few days at a time and then show up with his pockets stuffed with cash.

During one of his absences, three Montreal cops arrived on her doorstep with a search warrant. They came in and turned the place upside down, looking for money and cheques. They walked out empty-handed, leaving a confused Gisèle to tidy up.

Not long after, Robert showed up with one of his buddies—a real tough guy in a scuffed leather jacket who gave Gisèle the creeps. She could tell by the way they were smirking at each other, like two kids who'd just knocked a baseball through a neighbor's window, that something was up.

From a paper bag, Robert's sidekick produced a large ceramic cookie jar crammed full of crisp, new counterfeit twenties, fresh off the presses. Robert told Gisèle that they wanted her help. Why not take some of the bills to work and switch them for the real thing when her boss wasn't looking? "I told

them to take it away—I couldn't sleep with that thing in the house," she recalled. "But I got really scared, because if I open my mouth, I'm in trouble. My boyfriend didn't make the bills, but he knew the guy who did. And you never know with that one." Afterwards, Gisèle heard that the police had kept a tail on her for two months in case she'd tried to pass the phony notes.

It was around that time, in 1973, that Robert told Gisèle that he wanted to marry her and start a family.

She had tried to leave him twice before. She was fed up with his drinking, his low-life friends and rumors that he was seeing other women. Somehow, though, she'd always given in when he came begging for forgiveness.

But a wedding? That was something else entirely. Her father's advice kept coming back to her—if she was going to get married, she had to be prepared to follow and obey her husband for the rest of her life. She couldn't imagine doing that with Robert. Nor could she imagine bearing his children. She may have messed up her own life, but she wasn't going to inflict that kind of existence on an innocent little kid. "I looked at him and thought, *You?* I didn't want that man to be the father of my babies. What would he do with them? He had nothing good to offer. And that helped me to leave him." It was just as well. Gisèle heard later that Robert had bilked some woman out of thirty-five thousand dollars—sometime before he was gunned down on the streets of Montreal.

With nowhere else to turn, Gisèle caught the bus back to her parents' house in St. Joseph-de-la-Rive. Papa was back home, working as a navigator on barges on the St. Lawrence River. She might have stayed there forever, it was so good to be around

him again. But Gisèle and her mother still rubbed each other the wrong way. As Gisèle remembers it, she tried many times to have a civil conversation with her mother. But Madame Tremblay apparently resented her daughter's presence. Gisèle always seemed to be meddling in her affairs, questioning how she spent Papa's money. After a year, Gisèle left and went to Quebec City.

In a way, it was like starting over. She went to the store where she used to work, talked to her old supervisor and got a job in the sportswear department. She moved in with her sister Josephine, who'd been married, but was now separated and had her own apartment. For the first time in her life, Gisèle felt free and happy—she had money in her pocket, independence and a sister to keep her company. On weekends, they'd occasionally go out dancing and meet guys. It wasn't hard for a bright-eyed twenty-four-year-old with a cute smile to meet men, but Gisèle wasn't ready for another relationship. There was even an English-speaking guy from Montreal, Dave, a clerk for the municipal government who knew only a bit of French. Dave liked to drop into town now and then, but the times they spent together evidently meant a lot more to him than they did to Gisèle.

One day, during Carnival, the annual two-week-long Quebec City winter festival, Gisèle and her sister saw an announcement in the paper for a dance at a nearby Holiday Inn. "We looked at each other and said, *bon*, tonight we go out."

The place was packed and the band was playing old rock 'n roll standards from the fifties and sixties. Gisèle and Josephine positioned themselves at a table near the dance floor and ordered a couple of drafts. Every so often, guys would come up and ask

them to dance. The women hadn't had so much fun in months.

At one point Gisèle noticed a good-looking man with a moustache and thinning hair smoking cigarettes and standing by a table against the back of the ballroom. He looked to be a few years older than her. On the table was a display of wooden mugs, imitation telephones and other hand-carved knick-knacks. Now and then, the man would grab a fistful of mugs and circulate from table to table, looking for customers.

When he reached Gisèle's table, he flashed a big, toothy smile and said that the mugs were ten bucks apiece—but a pretty girl like her could have one for eight dollars.

"At first, I didn't like him," she recalled. "But we talked for a bit and he seemed like an interesting person. He knew lots of things, and he was very polite—I liked how he invited me to dance. It wasn't like I looked at him and fell in love or anything, but he was easy to talk to." She spent the evening dancing with the stranger, occasionally accepting invitations to dance from other men, too.

At the end of the night, the handsome stranger told Gisèle that he had a room in the hotel, and she was welcome to spend the night. "I said, 'No, I came here to dance, not to sleep.' " But before she went home with Josephine, Gisèle gave the man her telephone number. He said his name was Rock Thériault.

The date was the thirteenth of February, 1976—a Friday.

CHAPTER 3

IN THE BEGINNING



Gisèle Tremblay was not the first woman to be swayed by Rock's silver tongue, and she would be far from the last.

In his hometown of Thetford Mines, one hundred kilometers south of Quebec City, Rock had a wife, Francine Grenier, and two rambunctious young boys, Rock Jr. and François. But he was never much of a family man. It wasn't so much that he had a strong sex drive, although his appetite for carnal pleasures was undeniably powerful. No, Rock's relationships went far beyond sex. He seemed to have an insatiable hunger for acceptance and approval. Around women, he positively *craved* attention. And with his square-shouldered, muscular build, impish grin and piercing, sapphire-blue eyes that looked like they could bore holes through slabs of concrete, Rock usually had little difficulty attracting admirers.

"He's a very convincing, very hypnotic person," Francine Grenier told a Quebec journalist who interviewed her in 1978, a year-and-a-half after their marriage foundered. "And if anyone is insecure, he can make them believe *anything*."

Rock's powerful physical presence was only part

of his magnetic appeal. Whenever people met him for the first time, they were struck by his apparent warmth and sensitivity. Women found him romantic; men were drawn by his supreme confidence and carefree, uninhibited style. If you were in trouble, Rock was always among the first to lend a hand. When his friends were depressed, he quickly sized up the situation and offered comforting and insightful advice.

Rock was a born entertainer. He loved to while away the hours in Thetford's seedy watering holes, telling jokes and enlightening his drinking buddies about the great issues of the day. Whatever the subject—medicine, politics, psychology or religion—Rock had all the answers. True, he had no formal academic qualifications; he had quit school during his adolescence and now barely earned a living as a woodcarver and carpenter. But that was beside the point. For in his own mind, Rock had risen far above his modest station in life. He saw himself as a self-taught intellectual, a man of ideas. And while his surroundings might not have been commensurate with his intellectual prowess, for Rock, any audience would do. It made an incongruous spectacle: a rough-hewn man with thick hands and a face to match holding court amid a crowd of bemused guzzlers in a dingy, smoke-filled tavern where the carpets stank of stale beer.

But underneath that engaging veneer, his personality was a combustible mixture of arrogance and self-pity. He was a notorious crybaby, complaining endlessly about almost everything. With Rock, life's little problems took on epic proportions. What others might call a sore throat or a case of the sniffles, Rock would portray as a life-threatening disease. And while his marriage might not have been working out, it wasn't as though *he* had done anything

wrong. His wife, he complained to friends, was a heartless, self-centered nag who cared nothing for his problems and had played around with half the men in town.

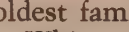
In reality, Rock's claims revealed far more about himself than others around him. Married to Grenier in 1967, he had begun to wander from the straight and narrow in the early 1970s. During the last three years of their relationship he became the town Lothario, seeking out young women who would be susceptible to his flowery turns of phrase and romantic gestures. Rock seemed to pick them up almost anywhere—in bars, at movie theaters and even supermarket checkout counters. He was capable of telling the plainest girl that she had the grace and beauty of a Greek goddess. He showered his dates with long, poetic love letters and sang to them as they walked hand-in-hand under a starlit sky. It was corny, but in a bleak, working-class town like Thetford Mines there was no shortage of young women who could be swept away by such gallantry.

When he wasn't trying to impress his conquests, Rock would often fish for sympathy by talking about his poor state of health. People joked that he was a hopeless hypochondriac. In his early twenties, he began to stop childhood friends in the street, shake his head gravely and confide to them that he had terminal cancer. Doctors who examined him could never find any evidence to support that diagnosis. In Rock's eyes, that only went to show the inadequacies of the medical establishment.

In reality, his health was far from robust. Throughout his teenage years, Rock suffered from sharp, stabbing pains in his abdomen. By the time he was twenty-three, he required a five-hour operation for duodenal ulcers at Montreal's Sacre-Coeur Hospital. The surgeon, Dr. Robert Weigand, re-

moved an ulcer from the interior wall of his stomach and cut away a portion of the organ ten by eighteen centimeters. Later that year, his condition became worse, prompting Weigand to remove another, smaller section of his stomach and sever his gastric nerves.

Years afterward, forensic psychiatrists would wonder if the bright, inquisitive young man's ulcers had been caused by a prolonged period of childhood stress. "Mr. Thériault appears to be somewhat of a 'renaissance man' whose major difficulty may be in finding a way to comfortably integrate into something other than a community of scholars," observed Dr. Bryan Jones, who interviewed Rock three times in 1992 at Millhaven Institution, a maximum-security penitentiary near Kingston, Ontario. "Perhaps with a less disturbed childhood and adolescence, and more opportunity, Mr. Thériault would have found himself in just such a community by now, rather than the one he is in."



Rock Thériault was born on May 16, 1947, a descendant of one of the oldest families in the country. According to Steven White, a genealogist at the Centre for Acadian Studies at the University of Moncton, all of the Thériaults now living in Canada can trace their roots to Jean and Perrine Thériault, who came to North America in the 1640s, most likely from the region of Poitou on the west coast of France. With about fifty other families, they settled in Port-Royal, a village on the Nova Scotia shore of the Bay of Fundy that was the first agricultural settlement of Europeans on soil that is now Canadian. Rather than clearing the upland forests, the Acadian colonists spread their dwellings along the winding and indented coastline and through the valleys,

building dikes to reclaim the fertile land that the bay's strong tides flooded twice a day.

Although the Thériaults lived as peasant farmers on land that belonged to a seigneur, or lord, they soon enjoyed relative prosperity. The drained tidal marshes were ideal for growing crops and hay, which was used for animal feed. They and the other families kept large herds of cattle, raised sheep for wool and cultivated apple orchards with seedlings brought from France—the origin of the thriving Annapolis Valley fruit industry. Jean Thériault died in 1671 leaving five sons and two daughters, whose families spread out from Port Royal and founded Grandpré, the present-day Wolfville.

By the 1750s there were about thirty-five Thériault families in Acadia, most with ten or twelve children. By then, however, the English had gained the upper hand in the continuing struggle with France for dominance over North America. In 1755, two thousand volunteer troops from New England captured the French garrison at Beauséjour, on the present-day border between Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. Although the Acadians had remained neutral throughout the French-English wars that century, and offered to surrender their firearms as proof of their loyalty, Nova Scotia's governors were unimpressed. Lieutenant Governor Charles Lawrence ordered his two thousand anti-Catholic troops to deport the Acadians and disperse them among the Thirteen Colonies. His men burned houses and barns, breaking up communities and closely-knit families. Herded aboard ships with little food or drinking water, an estimated one-third of the six thousand to ten thousand deported Acadians died during or soon after the exodus.

Many of the Thériaults were sent to Virginia, which refused to accept them and shipped them to

England. After seven years in internment camps, the British repatriated them to France. Finally, in 1785, seven shiploads of Acadians, including many Thériaults, sailed back across the Atlantic and settled in Louisiana. Today there are thousands of descendants of Jean Thériault among the state's one million Acadians, or Cajuns.

The more fortunate Acadians managed to flee from their homes before Lawrence's troops could round them up. They arrived in New France (now Quebec) as refugees, settling inferior bush plots or pockets of seigneurial land belonging to religious orders. In one fell swoop they had gone from prosperity to subsistence farming, hunting and fishing. Among them were two of Jean Thériault's great-great-grandsons, Paul and Joseph Thériault, who settled near Rivière Ouelle, on the south shore of the St. Lawrence opposite Baie St. Paul, and raised nineteen children. All of the Thériaults in the Lower St. Lawrence are descended from those two families.

Hyacinthe Thériault, Rock's father, is a member of that clan. Born in 1921 in Rivière-du-Loup, he moved later to the Saguenay Valley and started a family with his young bride, Pierrette. They lived in a simple frame house in Rivière-du-Moulin, a small village that has since been absorbed into the city of Chicoutimi. They didn't have much money—Hyacinthe worked as a housepainter and casual laborer—but they were devout Catholics and knew from the beginning they wanted to have a large family. Their first child, a girl they christened Claudette, arrived in 1945. She was followed by Rock, Rémy, Lauraine, Rosaire, Richard and Rachel. Another daughter, Monique, died in infancy.

Many years later, when Rock was facing a charge of first-degree murder, Hyacinthe Thériault com-

plained to the police that his eldest son was telling tall tales about the family. "He makes things up. Like, he once told someone that after my daughter Monique died, I kept the body for ten months before I buried it. That's not true."

When Rock was six, the family moved to the outskirts of Thetford Mines, an asbestos-mining town of 18,500 people midway between the St. Lawrence River and the Maine border. Hyacinthe built a white cement-block bungalow on Chemin de l'Aeroport (Airport Road), a semi-rural area where lots were going cheap because of the roar of aircraft overhead. Rock's parents sent him and his brothers and sisters to a four-room country schoolhouse called St. Anne's, which offered instruction up to Grade Seven. None of his childhood classmates remember any of the Thériault children continuing their education at the nearest high school, College Lasalle, ten kilometers away in town. "They were backwoods people," said Léandre Vachon, who grew up on a farm next door to the Thériault house. "Even if they had gone on to high school, I don't think an education would have changed those people."

Still, Rock was a bright student at St. Anne's and seemed eager to please. When he wasn't helping with the hay or feeding the animals at the Vachons' farm, he loved books. He often brought them home in his satchel to read while lying in bed—a habit that made him a bit of an oddball in the Thériault household. His father, a diabetic who supported the family by doing odd jobs around town, wasn't exactly the kind of man who encouraged intellectual curiosity.

Hyacinthe's one true passion was religion. He belonged to an authoritarian, quasi-fascist protest group called the White Berets that campaigned for

conservative values in the Catholic Church. The White Berets were an offshoot of the Créditiste movement, which arose during the Great Depression in rural Quebec at a time of profound economic and social upheaval. Like its Alberta counterpart, the Social Credit Party, the Créditiste movement took its inspiration from the writings of Major C.H. Douglas, a British engineer and air force reservist who believed that the increasing concentration of economic and political power in the hands of big banks and governments was leading inevitably to economic hardship among the masses and that governments could offer a solution by decentralizing the economic system and distributing regular dividends to consumers.

Unlike the Social Credit party in Alberta, the Créditistes proved incapable of electoral success. By the mid-1940s their leaders retrenched and formed a more radical, autocratic organization known as the Union des Electeurs, whose members sported white berets as a mark of distinction.

Retreating from electoral politics and turning increasingly toward religion, the *berets blancs*, as they became known, gained an active following among alienated, lower-middle-class males in rural Quebec. Their leaders were Louis Even and Gilberte Côté-Mercier, two journalists and devout Catholics who campaigned against the English business class, compulsory education and liberal reforms in the Church. Charismatic and dictatorial, they staged political rallies in which their followers marched with military precision. Even now, rank-and-file members go door to door to recruit new disciples by selling subscriptions to the White Beret newspaper, *Vers Demain* (Towards Tomorrow). Both it and its English edition, *Michael*, are sprinkled with anti-

Semitic references to Jewish bankers and corrupt politicians who seek "absolute world control."

Some critics went so far as to say that the movement resembled a religious cult. To Hyacinthe Thériault, however, the White Berets offered a refuge from the evil scourge of secularism and modern influences. A man of humble means and limited education, he had no time for the fast-talking men in big cars and fancy suits who enjoyed so many undeserved privileges. He was determined to ensure that his own family did not fall into that trap. A staunch Catholic and proud Quebec nationalist, he promised himself that his children would learn to respect and fear God.

Every Sunday, Hyacinthe would pack his kids, all of them in white berets, and head out to any one of the neighboring villages for their Sunday mission. They'd go from house to house with a collection box. Hyacinthe would knock, and when the owner opened the door the Thériault children would fall to their knees exactly as their father had taught them, bow their heads and recite a prayer. As soon as they said their Amens, the old man would ask for donations for the White Beret newspaper and for their cause. "We would see old man Thériault put on his white beret and troop the family off to their meetings," recalled Roger Beaulieu, sixty-six, a retired laborer and one of a half-a-dozen neighbors in the cluster of homes around the Thériault property. "People around here didn't like that too much."

Neither, for that matter, did young Rock. Instead of embracing his father's religious beliefs, he came to resent them. It was embarrassing to have to wear those berets and march around like a little soldier, begging for handouts from strangers. His friends teased him mercilessly. The experience bred in him a deep antipathy toward the Catholic church, which

he came to associate with pain and humiliation. Even as an adult, he burned with resentment every time he saw a priest in his robes or a statue of the Virgin Mary.

Young Rock often complained about being dragged out on Sunday missions with his brothers and sisters, but that only made matters worse. Hyacinthe, a short-tempered man with sad, drooping eyes and a thin black moustache, was a strong believer in parental discipline. Pierrette, too, learned to obey her husband. A frail, high-strung woman with pursed lips and poor eyesight, she did her best to keep the children in line. "You would hear her screaming at the kids from three-quarters of a mile down the road, like no other person could scream," one neighbor said.

Even the games Hyacinthe played with his sons were intended to harden their spirits and strengthen their capacity to endure pain. One such sport they called "bone." According to Léandre Vachon, "They would sit at the kitchen table with their heavy boots on and kick each other's shins until one of them gave in."

But old man Thériault's efforts to discipline his children were not entirely successful. The other children turned out fine, he'd tell his few friends, but Rock was a constant thorn in his side. He was brainy, all right—he even taught himself to speak English. But he was a smartass, always stirring up trouble and mouthing off to grown-ups. And even when you caught him red-handed, stealing coins from his mother's purse or smoking cigarettes behind the woodpile, he would somehow try to shift the blame onto his brothers and sisters. "He could always slough off responsibility," Hyacinthe once said. "He wasn't physically aggressive as a kid—he didn't get into a lot of fights." But he learned faster

than others and he could manipulate people. He could talk them into things.

"I never beat the boy," Hyacinthe would add, "but I punished him when he needed it."

How often that happened is difficult to say. Now that his first-born son has been sentenced to life in prison, Hyacinthe refuses to discuss his family's affairs with outsiders. "I don't want to talk about him or hear his name," the old man yelled at a reporter from *Maclean's* magazine who approached the house in January 1993. "I raised seven children and only one of them turned out like that."

As a child, Rock himself rarely complained to his friends about life at home. Once, though, in an apparent bid for sympathy, he told Emilien Vachon, Léandre's older brother, that his parents never gave him enough attention. He insisted that his youngest brother, Rosaire, was always the first to be served at the dinner table. According to Rock, Rosaire would bang his fists on the table and scream at his mother, "Where's my supper?"

Certainly the neighbors didn't think there were any serious problems in the Thériault home. Rock's father liked to drink now and then, but it wasn't as though he was a compulsive boozer. On the contrary, he seemed a rather righteous man with rigid ideas, the kind of father who didn't want any monkey-business going on under his roof. He wasn't terribly friendly with strangers—among other things, he used to order the municipal enumerators off his property, only to show up at the polling station on election day, demanding his right to vote. But none of his kids seemed frightened of him, Emilien Vachon recalled.

Claudette often came over to our house in the evenings, around the time she was fifteen

years old and I was dating her. When I picked her up to go out, her mother would tell her to be back at 9 p.m. Oh, we'd be having fun at our place, and then she'd realize she was half-an-hour or an hour late. But she never made a big deal of it. Seems to me that if she was afraid of her father, she would not have passed off being late so easily. She was never nervous. We never saw any signs of problems at home.

Claudette and I used to go to the theater and we'd talk. Rock, who was a couple of years younger, sometimes came along, too. And they never mentioned anything about hating their parents.

When we were a bit older, we began to go out with Mr. and Mrs. Thériault. Everybody would go down to the hotel for a few drinks. Rock's parents were always in good humor, and were known as bon vivants—toute la gang. Twice Mr. Thériault asked me if I could give him and his wife a ride down to the railway station where they would board the train for Rimouski. I think that's where their relatives lived. Well, my friend and I sat in the front while they were in the backseat of the car. They brought a big bottle of beer with them and started taking nips while we were driving. They were giggling and even giving each other pecks. And I remember thinking how nice it was to see two parents acting like young lovebirds.

Like his father now, Rock was reluctant for many years to discuss his upbringing, at least in public. His own 1981 memoirs glossed over his childhood,

relegating the subject to a mere one-and-a-half pages in a 173-page book. Furthermore, much of what he did write about his early life was untrue. He claimed that when he was five, his family moved to Abitibi, a remote region of Northern Quebec near the Ontario border. "My best moments," he wrote, "were those dedicated to exploring fields where I took pleasure in observing insects, birds and everything that moves in nature."

"With the forest began a prohibited zone," Rock continued, "and my mother was always telling me not to go into it. She would underline the risk of hurting myself and would speak to me of the dangers of meeting up with bears. This didn't make the forest any less attractive to me. Fear and fascination brought about in me a clash of titans everytime I went near it. . . . Oh, how I wished to be older, to dominate my fear, to be able to conquer this forest of my dreams."

In subsequent years, Rock embellished that story further. Interviewed by Toronto psychiatrist Dr. Andrew Malcolm in 1989, he recounted a series of mystical encounters and revelations that commenced, he said, in early childhood. He began his reminiscences, Malcolm later wrote, "by presenting what can only be described as a deliberate attempt at myth-making."

He said when he was a child he had been gamboling in the muskeg in the far north when he suddenly came face to face with a mother bear with two cubs. She rolled him over in the same way she rolled over her cubs; and in this idyllic circumstance he spent the entire afternoon.

He said he had had infantile paralysis at the age of six, and could not talk until he was

eight, and could hardly walk until he was twelve. Then, in 1954, in Thetford Mines, he had a dream in which he saw himself playing a role in a play about St. Joseph and the birth of Christ. A year later, he actually played the part of St. Joseph with the Blessed Virgin. After that, a young boy broke his teeth and [Rock] intervened and brought about a degree of healing in that case. Following this experience, he intentionally studied the mosses and the herbs and the plants, and he refined his skills as a healer. He soon was able to castrate cattle and pigs without the loss of any blood. He found that he could fix dislocations in people and animals. He could repair broken arms and legs. Although he only achieved a Grade Seven education, he taught himself a great deal about drugs and about many other aspects of medicine.



But those who knew Rock well as an adult heard a different story. He complained over and over again that his father beat him frequently and punished him by locking him in the cellar of the family's bungalow. In a medical history which he dictated in 1985 for the benefit of his family doctor, Rock also said that he had been wounded in his early childhood by a violent thrust against his abdomen. "He said all the time to me that his father hurt him, punched him hard in the stomach for nothing and worked him hard," recalled Gisèle Tremblay, his second wife. "He said he pushed him down a long set of stairs when he was nine or twelve. After that, he went to hospital for ulcers."

Another woman who became devoted to Hyacinthe's son, Francine Laflamme, said that Rock

used to tell her that "he was so severely abused as a child that when the surgeons removed his stomach, they said his internal organs were scarred."

It was two years after Malcolm's interview that Rock's lawyer arranged a meeting between Rock and Bryan Jones, who is the director of the regional forensic services program at Kingston Psychiatric Hospital. On that occasion, at least, Rock tried to peddle a different line from his far-fetched stories about idyllic encounters with nature and the animal kingdom. Jones wrote later that Rock appeared to be suffering severe emotional conflicts "arising from his early abused life experience."

> **He relates that his parents, or at least his father [whom he] describes as a violent alcoholic, abused him and that they now feel the guilt of the effect this appears to have had on their son. [He] is worried that his mother and father are "gonna die with this in their heart" and he is determined to make something of himself to prove that these early years can be forgotten.**



At St. Anne's, the young Rock had a reputation as an artistic and gifted pupil. His marks were consistently in the 90s, regardless of the subject. "He was intelligent, obedient and worked very hard," recalled Gabrielle Jacques, who taught both Rock and his older sister Claudette. "He always did his homework. You could rely on him."

In the schoolyard he liked to horse around with the other boys, using his superior strength to put them in holds and pin them down. But it was all in good fun—nobody would have called him a bully.

During the two years she taught Rock, Gabrielle

never met Hyacinthe and Pierrette Thériault. Even so, she gained a favorable impression of the family. "The Thériault children always had a full lunch box, were always well-dressed, clean and didn't require any special attention," she said. "We had the feeling that their parents were taking good care of them."

In his Grade Seven final exams, Jacques said, Rock came in first or second among all students in the Thetford region. That fall, he enrolled in Grade Eight in a nearby junior high school.

But before his fourteenth birthday, Rock surprised his teachers by dropping out of school. Like his father, he picked up odd jobs around town, which in Rock's case amounted to shovelling snow in the winter and cutting grass in the summer. It wasn't much, but he was his own boss. If there was anything that Rock hated, it was taking orders from someone else. He got enough of that at home.

Around town, he was known as one of the boys. He had a large circle of friends and hung out at the local bars, social clubs and dance halls. Rock knew how to tell a good story, and on the rare occasions when he *wasn't* there, you could sense that something was missing.

"He was a good-looking man," said André Grégoire, one of the local lads who befriended Thériault as a teenager. "He had a certain devious look to him, but always spoke with a slight smile. He never had any problems getting girls, that's for sure."

Indeed, Rock took pride in his reputation as a ladies' man. He knew that when it came to relations with the opposite sex, he had something special to offer. "Since my childhood," he later wrote, "I have always believed I was different, not your average Joe. This was not only a mental impression but also

an anatomical one." To put it another way, he was extremely well endowed.

One night, Rock met Francine Grenier at a dance in Vimy Ridge, a small village near Thetford Mines. She was a big-boned, buxom girl, three years younger than Rock, from a big family in the neighboring parish of Coleraine. She had thin lips, a fondness for inexpensive jewelry and a way of applying her make-up that made her look a little on the cheap side. Rock wasn't financially well off—anyone could see that—but he knew how to sweet-talk a girl and he was good at anything he put his mind to. She quickly fell in love with him.

On Remembrance Day, 1967, Canada's centennial year, the young couple married at St. Joseph-de-Coleraine church. It was a traditional ceremony with lots of guests—all of Rock's brothers and sisters, as well as his parents, attended, as did Grenier's parents and siblings. The bride's family was well known in the area as a tough bunch. Her brothers were rough and were always getting into barroom brawls. Friends said they got that from their father, Odilon, who was "quite the character."

According to Hyacinthe Thériault, the marriage between Rock and Francine "was stormy and ill-fated from the beginning."

But Francine recalled things rather differently. Shortly after they got married, Rock built them a one-and-a-half storey frame house with rough-sawn pine siding, a wide verandah and a tall brick chimney. The address was 3041 Airport Road, about a kilometer down the road from Rock's parents.

Not long after that, Rock and Francine moved to Montreal, leaving their house in Remy's hands. Rock found a job with the fire department inspecting furnaces and cleaning chimneys. They didn't have a lot of money, but they were comfortable

enough. And Rock was fun to be around. After a few drinks, he became a comedian, a showman—he just loved to act.

Five months after the wedding, Francine became pregnant. On January 10, 1969, she delivered a son, Rock Sylvain. She became pregnant again in the summer of 1970. But before she gave birth to a second boy, François, the following April, Rock became seriously ill. It was then that he was admitted to hospital suffering from duodenal ulcers.

The removal of a major portion of Rock's stomach seemed to have a profound impact on him. During the summer, as Francine changed diapers and nursed her two young sons, Rock spent hours at the kitchen table poring over medical textbooks. By the fall, when he went under the surgeon's knife for the second time, he could recite every detail of his condition and the procedure he underwent.

The operation, however, only seemed to make matters worse. For months afterward, Rock was vomiting and experiencing acute abdominal pain. The following January, his gastrologist told him that he was suffering from a rare, untreatable disorder known as Dumping Syndrome, a condition that afflicts about five per cent of patients who undergo such operations. Caused by the severing of gastric nerves, the condition damages the stomach's ability to contract and knead the food within it. The contents thus remain solid, and if combined with large amounts of liquid, the mass can move rapidly from the stomach to the intestines, allowing very little benefit to the body from the food which was taken in. It causes weakness and, in some cases, severe pain.

Rock began taking antacid pills and prescription painkillers to alleviate the physical discomfort. But the pain would stay with him for the rest of his life.

Moreover, the surgery appeared to affect him psychologically. People said that something in his head had snapped. He developed an obsession with medicine and complained that he was slowly dying. Up to that point, Rock had seemed a responsible and attentive husband. Now he became reckless and self-centered, seemingly convinced that no one else's problems could rival his own. "The stomach operation was a major turning point in our married life," Grenier later said. "This was a very difficult time for me." Another person who knew Rock in those years said that he "used to tell stories about his operation and tell people that his insides were now made of plastic." Before long, Rock quit the fire department and moved his young family back to Thetford Mines.

Once again, Rock displayed his resourcefulness. Drawing on his amateur skills as a woodcarver and carpenter, he set up shop on his father's property. He would cut down tree limbs with a chain saw and fashion them into rustic handmade furniture, ornate wooden clocks and trophies. But his best-selling creations were the beer mugs, which he began peddling in the local bars. He started by hollowing out a section of bark-covered tree branch on a lathe, then stuck a crude handle on the side with a dowel and a couple of drops of glue, and coated the finished product with shellac.

His efforts initially brought in enough cash to feed and clothe his family, but Rock's behavior became increasingly erratic. It was as though his suffering had granted him licence to do anything he wanted, without regard for convention or the opinion of others. His only concern seemed to be for his own pleasure. Back when they were newlyweds, the jealous young husband had demanded that Francine wear scrupulously long dresses to preserve her mod-

esty. Suddenly, he was encouraging her to wear mini-skirts and talking endlessly about sex. At one point he asked his in-laws if he could open a nudist colony on their farmland. They turned him down flat. Recalled one of Francine's cousins: "Maybe he was ahead of his time, but the rapid change in his character led us to believe something was wrong upstairs."

By the early 1970s, Rock also became involved in local politics. When some neighbors joined a citizens' committee to protest against the established procedures for issuing construction permits, he got his hands on a copy of the municipal code and memorized it from A to Z. "He surprised us all with his knowledge, so we let him sit on the committee," Léandre Vachon recalled. "If there was one weakness in the law he would find it and exploit it to its fullest. He was good." Enjoying the spotlight, Rock ran for office in December 1975 and captured a seat on city council as one of two representatives of the Airport Road district, which had about two thousand residents. But his political colleagues, as well as the members of the citizens' committee, soon became fed up with him because of his stubbornness and his embarrassing inability to compromise in negotiations. "He'd bang his fists down on the table and say, 'We want this, this and this,' " Vachon said. "So one of us always had to step in and take control of the situation before it got out of hand."

Eddy Auclair, a twenty-year veteran of municipal politics who was Rock's seat-mate in the council chamber, described his former colleague as a "no good charlatan."

Thériault had this citizens' group behind him and he wanted to change everything. He

would carry his copy of the municipal code everywhere in a briefcase, to meetings and around town. If someone stopped him on the street and asked him a question on a bylaw, he'd pull out his municipal code right there and quote the law.

Rock had no logic in his dealings, yet he'd argue against everyone on the council. He wanted to change the affairs of the town immediately, without reflecting. He had a whole lot of big ideas, but they weren't financially feasible. He wanted to build new roads, playgrounds, renovate old houses, all kinds of things. But he couldn't count. His plans would have thrown the town into financial ruin—we would have gone broke. In fact, we did go ahead with the playgrounds, but we couldn't afford the upkeep and had to close one down.



Suddenly, in May 1976, Rock stopped attending municipal meetings. The other councillors eventually voted him out of office, using an obscure bylaw that allowed members to be removed from their seats if they were absent for more than three months.

Somewhere about that time, Rock decided, against his doctor's advice, to stop taking medication for his stomach problems. He complained that the pills were sapping his virility and making it difficult for him to urinate. He started to drink heavily, apparently to dull the chronic pain in his digestive system.

Although Rock was continuing to sell his woodcarvings in Thetford Mines and the surrounding area, his family was on welfare and the debts were piling up. Typically, however, he insisted to ac-

quaintances around town that his business was thriving. "He walked around with a chequebook sticking out of his back pocket for all to see, to pretend he was rich," said one local. "He went and wrote cheques to everybody, and they all bounced."

Francine wasn't sure exactly how much money Rock was bringing in from his carvings. The only thing she knew for certain was that she wasn't seeing much of it. There was a parade of bill collectors coming to the door—and she was the one who usually had to do the explaining. Rock told her that he had to go away on business, but she suspected him of running around with other women. Meanwhile, old man Thériault was threatening to kick Rock off his property for running up bills in his name.

Finally, Rock's business went bankrupt. The local credit union moved in and repossessed the house, forcing Francine and the kids to move into an apartment. To make ends meet, she got a job waitressing. Rock could go to hell as far as she was concerned.

With everything else going on, few of Rock's friends and relatives paid much notice to his growing fascination with the occult—a common trait among people suffering from delusional disorders. Years earlier, André Grégoire had recommended Rock for membership in the local branch of the Aramis Club, the French-Canadian equivalent of the Shriners. He gradually worked his way up to president of the initiation committee, which oversaw the society's secret rules for new members.

But as soon as he gained control of the committee, Rock set out to change the rituals. The club was affiliated with the Catholic church, and Rock used the opportunity to thumb his nose at the institution he had grown to hate. One day, he showed up at an initiation meeting grinning and carrying a long black cape emblazoned with the face of the devil.

The other members were shocked, which only seemed to increase Rock's delight. "He wanted all new members to wear the image of Satan on their backs and all kinds of weird stuff," Grégoire said, shaking his head at the memory. "We were just a bunch of average Catholic guys. We couldn't accept his strange ideas."

CHAPTER 4

THE SEDUCTION



"Gisèle, I have something for you—it's sort of a late Valentine's Day present. Can I come over? I promise you it will only take a couple of minutes."

Rock was being persistent. It had been a week since he'd met Gisèle Tremblay in the ballroom of the Holiday Inn. It was Friday, and he'd jumped in his truck in the morning to make the two-hour drive to Quebec City. On this trip, he wasn't planning to do any business—he was more interested in getting together with Gisèle. He'd waited until dinnertime to call, figuring that she'd be home from work for the weekend.

Gisèle was flattered by Rock's obvious interest in her, but something else weighed on her mind. Her sometime boyfriend in Montreal, Dave, was coming into town to see her the next day. On the other hand, Rock *did* say that his visit to her apartment would be brief. What would be the harm in letting him drop by?

She gave him her address, and within a few minutes he was at the door. He was dressed in the same suit he'd worn the previous weekend, clutching two red roses and one of his trademark carved mugs.

"Here, you forgot this," he said, smiling and

handing her the wooden handicraft. "And please, don't worry about the money. It's a gift."

He paid her a compliment and she invited him into the living room where Josephine was watching television.

Five hours later, Rock was still there.

All evening, he talked and entertained the women with stories about his life, his friends in the Aramis Club and his career in local politics. It wasn't all fun and amusement, though. He also described his stomach operation in great detail, and told tales of how his father had beat him as a child. The old man was the worst kind of Catholic, he said, a member of the White Berets and a heartless bully. At one point, Rock went out to his truck and fished a twenty-six-ouncer of cognac out from under the front seat. He brought it inside and offered Gisèle and her sister a drink. They each had a small glass, but neither could keep up with Rock. He drank the stuff as if it was mother's milk.

In the middle of one of Rock's yarns, the phone rang and Gisèle got up to answer it. It was Dave calling from Montreal to check if they were still on for Saturday night. Sure, Gisèle said. After all, a promise was a promise.

"After I hung up," Gisèle said, "Rock looked at me like I had hurt him. It was like, *Oh, poor baby, he's going to be left all alone.* And I said to him, 'Hey, I don't have anything going with you.' Anyway, he got over it after a couple of minutes and we went back to talking."

They talked all night. By 6 a.m. Saturday, Rock had polished off three-quarters of the cognac and Gisèle was desperate to crawl into her bed and get some sleep. Finally, she told Rock that she needed to rest—she didn't want to look like a wreck when Dave showed up that afternoon. Rock again made a

face like a wounded puppy, as though Gisèle should somehow feel guilty for abandoning him. But she insisted, telling Rock it was okay if he wanted to crash on the couch.

When Dave arrived late that afternoon, Rock was still asleep on the couch, snoring. He never saw Gisèle leave. She spent the night dancing at the Holiday Inn with Dave, eventually going back to his hotel room.

She got back to her apartment shortly before noon on Sunday. Rock was gone. In her bedroom, she found an envelope propped up on the bureau. Inside was a two-page letter from Rock, written in saccharine prose and full of intimate confessions. He said that he loved Gisèle, and that she had hurt him by spending the night with another man. But that was all right—he forgave her.

Years later, two phrases from the letter remained frozen in Gisèle's memory. "He said that he thought he was going to love me too much, and he wanted me to be the mother of his children." It seemed a trifle excessive, considering that they had met each other only twice. But Gisèle had always had a weakness for romantic gestures, and this guy knew how to make her feel special.

She didn't hear from Rock for two weeks, until one day he reappeared on her doorstep and she invited him in for tea. He was there for about an hour when a delivery man arrived with a bouquet of a dozen roses, a gift from Dave. A little later, her Montreal suitor phoned to arrange another date.

Gisèle's guest stayed a while longer and then left. She was beginning to grow very fond of Rock, but she was confused about what to tell Dave.

As it turned out, the important matter Dave wanted to discuss was marriage. He wanted to know if Gisèle would move to Montreal and live

with him. If everything worked out, they'd get married six months later. But Gisèle would have none of it. After four years with Robert, the last thing she wanted was to shack up with another man. The very idea of marriage left her feeling trapped. "A wedding is like a pair of handcuffs—easy to get into, hard to get out," she liked to say.

When Dave brought up the subject of marriage again a week later, it gave her the excuse to end the relationship. She told her sister that she was a free woman.



The next time Rock came for a visit, she let him stay the night.

He was exactly as his letter had promised, passionate, thoughtful and romantic. "He was everything a woman could want in a man," Gisèle recalled. "Good-looking, very polite, very spiritual, very tender." In his arms she felt secure, in a way she hadn't felt since she had sat in her father's lap in that rocking chair in St. Joseph-de-la-Rive. She could feel herself falling in love.

But one thing was bothering her. Rock loved to talk about himself—his woodcarving business, his knowledge of medicine, his blossoming political career and much else. But whenever she tried to raise the subject of his personal life, he became strangely evasive.

We were drinking scotch in the hotel bar one night and I said to him, "Rock, I want to talk to you, but not here." So we went out to the car and I asked him a question. "Are you married? Because I don't want any problems." He said he was, and then he burst out in tears. He cried and he cried. He said he was sick.

Nobody was taking care of him, and he had cancer. The way he described it, his wife was always out with other men, she was a bad mother. But he—he was so clean, so good. He knew my nature. He knew how I would react.



Gisèle reacted by quitting her job at the department store to be with Rock. They spent the summer of 1976, a period when most Quebecers were absorbed by the Olympic Games in Montreal, traveling up and down the province, sleeping in a tent and selling Rock's wares at local fairs. Gisèle's unemployment insurance cheques supplemented their income. In Chicoutimi, Rock took Gisèle to Rivière-du-Moulin and pointed out the home where he'd been born. He explained that his parents had lived there for a few years before taking him to the remote northern Abitibi region, where he frolicked in the woods and developed an abiding love of nature.

He had an abiding love of alcohol, too. All summer Rock drank heavily. At a fair in Sherbrooke one day in August, the young couple hooked up with the driver of a Labatt's truck who was offering free beer as part of a promotion. Rock drank all afternoon and night, then crawled into the tent and began to vomit heavily. Then he passed out. Gisèle, convinced that he was dying, ran back to the beer truck to get help. An ambulance came and took him to the hospital, where he spent the night.

The rest of the time, however, Rock kept Gisèle amused. As soon as they blew into a new town, he would strike up friendships with merchants, the police and local politicians, buying them drinks and telling them off-color stories and jokes. He was an

incorrigible prankster. Once, in Dolbeau, near Lac St.-Jean, he walked into a strip club with a pint of strawberries and talked one of the dancers into letting him join her act. When she appeared on stage a little later, there was a pair of strawberries stuck to her nipples. Suddenly Rock got up from his seat, waltzed up to the stripper and proceeded to nibble the strawberries. His drinking buddies roared with laughter, unaware that it was all a set-up.

Another time, he enlisted the owner of a fancy restaurant in one of his gags. Dressed in smelly, ragged clothes and covered with dirt, he stumbled up to one of the tables, pretending to be drunk. As the patrons gazed in horror, he scooped a thick steak from one of the plates and stuffed it in his pocket. The customers were just about to call the police when Rock and the manager announced that it was all a joke. Rock quickly made amends with the startled diners by offering to pick up their tab. By the end of the evening they were acting like old friends.

All the while, Gisèle still had her apartment with Josephine in Quebec City. But Rock kept asking her —gently at first, then with more persistence—to move to Thetford Mines. He and Francine were finished, he told her, and they had sold their house. Gisèle could get a nice apartment there, and when the unemployment insurance ran out she could go on welfare. Meanwhile, Rock would be earning a lot of money with his handicrafts.

At the end of the summer, Gisèle did as Rock had suggested. She looked through the newspaper and found a cheap apartment in Thetford in a converted garage in the backyard of a large, postwar house. It had only a small bedroom, a carpeted living room and a galley kitchen, but it was plenty of room for one person, and Rock could stay over whenever he

liked. On weekends, he would come by with the two boys, Rock Jr., who was now seven, and five-year-old François. Gisèle enjoyed nothing better than being around the kids, who spent the rest of the week with their mother. Of course, it drove Francine crazy that Rock Jr. and François occasionally called Gisèle "Mama," but that was her problem.

At first, Rock and Gisèle were like any young couple in love—going to bars, dancing all night and making love. But as autumn turned to winter, Gisèle began to detect a change in Rock. He'd always had a fascination with religion, but now it seemed to be growing into an obsession. He railed about the Catholic church, which he said was as dangerous as the devil himself. All that the priests and bishops cared about was coaxing donations out of their hapless parishioners—money that was squandered on elaborate cathedrals and useless statues of the Virgin.

By reading the Bible for himself, Rock told Gisèle, he had discovered a more honest and pure source of spirituality. It was to be found in the pages of the Old Testament, where the battle lines between good and evil were clearly drawn. Whenever he came over for the night, he would launch into a long discourse about the ancient prophets and the lessons they could teach the modern world.

He was talking about God and the Bible—what did I think about that? He'd sit up until three in the morning and tell me about the Ten Commandments and the Old Testament. To tell the truth, I never really cared much about God before that. But he would pull out a Bible and start explaining what particular

passages meant. One thing he really liked to talk about was the role of women—how women were supposed to be submissive to their men. He would point to a page and say, "See Gisèle? That's good. I want you to think a little bit about that."

CHAPTER 5

GREAT AWAKENING



The Seventh-day Adventist Church is one of a number of Christian fundamentalist sects that sprang up in the northeastern United States between 1825 and 1850, a period of religious revivalism that became known as the Second Great Awakening.

As its name suggests, the movement marked the resurgence of an earlier wave of evangelical fervor that swept New England and the Middle Colonies in the 1730s. The seeds of the first Great Awakening were sown by the Puritan fanatic Jonathan Edwards in his church in Northampton, Massachusetts, as a reaction against the rise of liberalism and an apparent decline in religious piety. Spewing fire and brimstone, Edwards denounced the depravity of man and warned nonbelievers that God held them "over the pit of Hell, much as one holds a spider or some loathsome insect over the fire." His teachings created an immense stir throughout the colonies, but the movement died out as quickly as it had arisen, unable to sustain itself against the march of reason and science.

Then, in the 1820s, a new spirit of revivalism took hold in the rolling hills of central New York

and along the Erie Canal, an area where so many evangelical movements flared up that it became known as the "Burned-over District." The canal's completion in 1825 had ushered in a period of rapid industrialization. The recent introduction of factories and mills to a formerly agrarian society had created new wealth but strained the social fabric, leaving many men and women disoriented and hungry for the perceived stability of the past. All across the region, charismatic preachers harvested followers with week-long camp meetings at which the susceptible wept, barked and bayed, rolled on the ground and spoke in tongues. One revivalist group, the Oneida Community, established in 1848 by John Humphrey Noyes, believed in "complex marriage," in which all the men were considered married to all the women. Rejecting traditional notions of the family, every resident was free to engage in sex with any consenting partner. The group supported itself by selling arts and crafts.

The thrust of the Second Great Awakening was to uphold traditional Christian values. But instead of encouraging a return to established denominations, it spawned an array of new sects and breakaway groups, including the Oneida, the Shakers and the Amana movement, most of which tried to realize Christian ideals by founding communities based on socialist principles. The most famous sect of the period was Joseph Smith's Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints—the Mormons—which formed in upstate New York in the 1830s and migrated to Utah in 1848, by which time it had embraced the doctrine of polygamy.

Another leading proselytizer was William Miller, a Baptist farmer-turned-preacher based in Dresden, New York. He founded the Millerite, or Adventist, movement and attracted over two hundred thou-

sand converts among the weak-minded of the United States and Canada. Relying on his own peculiar reading of the Bible, Miller calculated that the world would come to an end on October 22, 1844. Thousands of his followers sold their possessions, dressed in robes and awaited the Second Coming on rooftops, hills and haystacks because they believed that it would shorten their journey to heaven. A convert in Port Perry, Ontario, gave away a one hundred-acre farm and all its equipment on the assumption that it would all be destroyed anyway in the coming apocalypse. Another follower, Sarah Terwilligar of Oshawa, donned wings of silk and jumped off a roof, convinced that she would be swept up to heaven. In nearby Mariposa township, in the southwest corner of Victoria County near Lindsay, Ontario, a Millerite convert named Hoover talked himself into believing that he was a deity and announced to his neighbors that he was going to walk the five miles across Lake Scugog to Caesarea. Hundreds of locals came to watch the feat, hooting and jeering when Hoover failed to pull off the stunt.

Unfortunately for Miller, the announced Day of Reckoning came and went without incident. The day has passed down in Adventist parlance as "The Great Disappointment."

Many of Miller's followers abandoned the movement after that. But a handful of believers carried on the tradition. The most prominent, Ellen White, claimed to have had a vision: Christ had failed to materialize only because he had chosen to cleanse the "heavenly sanctuary rather than the earthly one." The Lord had begun the task of judging mankind, White said, and would admit to heaven only those who had demonstrated their worthiness.

White's preachings eventually led to the founding

of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Battle Creek, Michigan, in 1863. She wrote fifty-three books, declaring variously that wearing wigs caused insanity because they constricted the brain, that masturbation was killing "tens of thousands," and that tight corsets produced inheritable deformities.

Now headquartered in Washington, D.C., the Seventh-day Adventist Church has become a worldwide movement with seven million followers in 185 countries, including forty-two thousand Canadian members in 328 churches. Followers believe in the observance of Saturday as the sabbath, baptism by immersion and the imminent return of Christ, after which the deserving, both living and resurrected, will attain immortality. The Church's literature abounds with references to the end of the world, teaching that wickedness will increase as the apocalypse approaches, culminating in a seven-year cataclysmic struggle between the forces of evil and the forces of righteousness. At that time, the Antichrist ("the Beast" in the *Book of Revelation*) will oversee a global military and economic dictatorship. According to historian Paul Boyer, author of *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture*, believers in the apocalypse cite a number of "signs of the times" in support of their prophecies. These include the Holocaust, the founding of the state of Israel in 1948, Israel's recapture of East Jerusalem in 1967, the creation of the European Community, the emergence of a global computer network and the deterioration of the environment.

In addition to abstaining from alcohol and tobacco, and adhering to orthodox Jewish food laws, many Adventists refrain from eating any meat, substituting textured soya products instead. The Church also supports 325 medical clinics, 450 col-

leges and secondary schools and nearly four thousand elementary schools around the world.

But although it continues to attract new members, particularly from poorer members of society and those alienated from the mainstream, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has also been rocked in recent years by infighting and debate about White's status as a prophet. Some dissidents claim that the trances from which she drew inspiration were actually epileptic seizures. They also accuse her of plagiarizing her nutritional ideas from contemporaries such as John Kellogg, inventor of the cornflake. And since the 1930s, the Seventh-day Adventist establishment has been struggling to purge itself of a right-wing splinter group which claims to be more true to doctrine than the Church itself. Known as the Branch Davidians, the faction was founded by a Bulgarian emigré and prominent Los Angeles-area Adventist, Victor Houteff, who believed that Christ's return was imminent but could not happen until there was a purer church. When a book he wrote upset church officials, Houteff left California and established a semi-communal farm in Waco, Texas.

After Houteff's death in 1955, the group began to disintegrate. But his widow, Florence, attracted a large group of new followers by proclaiming that the world would end on Easter Day, 1959. Hundreds of Adventists quit their jobs, sold everything and made the pilgrimage to Waco to await Judgement Day. Many left when the prophecy proved false, but the most ardent believers stayed and pledged their allegiance to a new prophet, Ben Roden. When he died in 1978, his wife Lois took over.

Six years later, a failed rock guitarist and disillusioned Adventist named Vernon Howell arrived in Waco and tried to establish himself as the Branch

Davidians' leader by sleeping with Lois Roden. He was twenty-four; she was sixty-seven. Former members of the cult say that Roden felt sorry for Howell because he had confessed to excessive masturbation. Soon after, he disavowed the elderly prophetess, claiming that he was the seventh and final angel referred to in the *Book of Revelation* and had been sent to earth to prepare for the New Jerusalem.

By 1988, Howell, a ninth-grade dropout, had used his charm and extraordinary powers of persuasion to assume command of the Waco compound. He changed his name to David Koresh (Koresh is Hebrew for Cyrus, the Persian king who subdued Babylon in 539 B.C. and allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem) and announced that God wanted him to build a new House of David with many wives. From then on, he controlled every aspect of life in the complex, using isolation, fear and other well-known tools of mind control. His followers began each day at 5:30 a.m. with boot-camp style paramilitary training while Koresh lay in bed until 2 p.m. Then he would preach Bible classes to his exhausted disciples, who survived on strict rations of food and water. Those who wavered from his teachings or fell asleep during his apocalyptic sermons were paddled by one of Koresh's lieutenants with an oar inscribed with the words *It is Written.*

Koresh's principal fixation, however, seemed to be sex. He declared that his seed was divine and that, as God's representative, he should have total control over the sex lives of his followers. While the other men in the compound were forced into celibacy, he took their wives and daughters, some as young as eleven, as his concubines. In the enfeebled minds of his disciples, the punishments and sexual excesses only seemed to confirm Koresh's divinity.

At first, the authorities maintained an uneasy

truce with Koresh, unable to find witnesses who would testify against him. But in late February 1993, after complaints that the group was stockpiling weapons illegally, one hundred federal agents stormed the compound. Four agents and six cult members died in the gun battle, which marked the beginning of a fifty-one day seige. Finally, on April 19, the Federal Bureau of Investigation attempted another raid. Koresh, who had warned all along that he would not be taken alive, ordered his acolytes to set fire to the complex. He and seventy-one others died in the inferno.



From the beginning, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has campaigned against the Branch Davidians. The Church's own practices are similar to those of many other proselytizing religions. To attract converts, Adventists conduct heavily promoted "crusades" or "prophecy seminars." Typically, a pastor who already tends to a congregation in one community sets himself up in a neighboring town or city for three or four weeks at a stretch. After renting a hall, he and his assistants take out newspaper advertisements and distribute handbills inviting local residents to attend a seminar on an attention-grabbing topic—Is the family obsolete? or How will the world end?

The proceedings adhere to a time-honored script. Those who attend the initial seminar are invited back a day or two later to a follow-up session, and then additional meetings four or five times a week for the duration of the crusade. Before long, the topics of discussion shift from issues of broad public interest to the doctrines of Seventh-day Adventism. The disinterested and the merely curious fall away, leaving behind a core group of enthusiasts. The pas-

tor's ultimate goal is to visit potential recruits in their homes to size them up for conversion. If all goes well, he baptizes them—establishing the nucleus of a new congregation. Finally the Church's regional office, known as a conference, dispatches a full-time pastor to minister to the flock.

George Hermans was one of the Adventists' most successful crusaders in Quebec during the late 1970s and pastor of St. Léonard Church in suburban Montreal. A short, bespectacled man with a fatherly smile, Hermans was something of a household name across the province as the congenial host of a Saturday afternoon religious television program called *Il Est Écrit* (It Is Written). He would advertise his public appearances around the province on TV and Church members would hand out leaflets bearing Hermans' photo and the time and place of an upcoming session. The technique proved effective. In a kind of religious bait-and-switch routine, Hermans would host the first one or two meetings and then hand over the reins to a lesser-known pastor.

At some point in late January or early February of 1977, the Seventh-day Adventist Church targeted Thetford Mines. The handbills went out, ads appeared in the papers and Hermans announced to his TV viewers that he was going to be in Thetford the following Saturday to speak about the future of the human race.

Sitting in the audience on the first night of that crusade was a clean-shaven twenty-nine-year-old with deep-blue eyes and a shiny, by now prematurely bald, pate. George Hermans cannot remember if he met or spoke to Rock Thériault that night, but before long he was to become all too familiar with the strange young man.

"He struck me as the kind of person," Hermans said years later, "who could easily become a fanatic."



After the first two sessions in Thetford, George Hermans passed the baton over to a part-time Montreal evangelist named Nathan Prosper, who continued the crusade for about a month. Rock came back again and again, attracted by the Adventists' message of spiritual redemption and the coming Judgement Day. It wasn't anything like the church he had grown up with—there were no ornate cathedrals, no incomprehensible rituals, no cold, aloof priests who tried to make their congregation feel guilty for simply being human. Prosper and his colleagues were modest men who took a personal interest in the lives of others. They dressed simply and needed only a Bible to preach the word of the prophets. Beyond that, Rock knew that his father would be outraged by his decision to break away from the Catholic faith. It took only a few weeks before Prosper had convinced Rock to be baptized.

When Prosper went back to Montreal, his place was taken by Pierre Zita, a lanky, twenty-nine-year-old pastor who had grown up on the West Indian island of Guadeloupe and studied in France before emigrating to Canada in 1973. The congregation he took over was a small one—"only six adults and a few children"—so rather than building a church they rented a hotel room for their Saturday morning services. The room was in a strip motel on the edge of town, the kind of place where the most memorable feature is the constant din of passing transports.

They met at 9:30 a.m. and sang hymns for fifteen minutes. Then Zita would preside over an hour-

long Sabbath school devoted to the study of Seventh-day Adventist tenets—usually opening with a question like, "When does Jesus Christ say He will return to Earth?" or "What will Christ do when He comes?" That was followed by a fifteen-minute recess and an hour of prayer, finishing at noon. After a simple lunch, the troupe would embark on a door-to-door "witnessing" program to spread the Gospel.

Among his fellow Adventists, Rock became known as "Brother Thériault." In line with Church teachings, he quit drinking and smoking and adopted a vegetarian diet. And he demonstrated his skills as a recruiter early on, dragging Gisèle out to meetings and urging her to follow his example.

"The first time he brought it up, he told me he'd met some Seventh-day Adventists and he really liked them—they had good spirits and it was a very natural religion," Gisèle recalled. "There was a priest who had meetings every Saturday, a black man, who talked to Rock often. I guess the priest didn't want Rock living with a woman who wasn't his wife, because he started sleeping in his truck. We were still having sex, but he wanted to look very spiritual so he made a nice bed in the back of his truck. And Rock looked so religious, you know?" In truth, Rock had little interest in Christ's life, his resurrection and other parts of the New Testament. But he seemed almost to have a morbid fascination with the idea of the Second Coming and the division of the human race into the damned and the blessed. The apocalypse would cleanse the earth of the unbelievers—people like his father, his estranged wife and all those narrow-minded zealots in the White Berets.

Rock also seemed to enjoy having a captive, sympathetic audience for his self-serving stories. He

told them about his financial woes and about his heartless ex-wife—how she'd turfed him out of the family home and was leading a sinful life, drinking, cursing and fornicating like some devil's apprentice. One of his fellow worshippers, René Verville, took pity on Rock and offered to let him sleep in an empty warehouse where Verville was planning to start a woodworking business. Verville, a born-again Christian who had joined the Adventists three years earlier and ran an excavation business in Montreal, figured that Rock was the perfect person to manage his planned new venture. He seemed pious and serious, and claimed to be able to make practically anything with a piece of wood. Rock moved into the warehouse in February, creating a small room in the corner with a bed, several space heaters and makeshift partitions of unpainted plywood. He promised to pay Verville back by cleaning up the rest of the building and outfitting the shop so that it could open for business in the spring. But for all of Rock's big talk, he didn't accomplish much. Most of the time he just stood around, complaining that he was too sick to take on any heavy chores. "He worked a little bit, but in reality I supported him," said Verville, now sixty-four. "I found him very irritating. Sometimes I'd get angry at him and he'd start sobbing. It was pitiful." Soon, Verville concluded that Rock wasn't nearly as talented as he claimed. "I guess you could say he changed for the worse. His chest swelled and he started exaggerating. That's what happens to people who think they know more than everyone else—Satan takes possession of them."

Verville decided to bail out before he squandered any more money. He sold the warehouse and told Rock he would have to move out. Just so there were

no hard feelings, he co-signed a loan for two thousand dollars to help the convert resettle.

Zita, too, was beginning to have doubts about Rock's sincerity. He didn't appreciate the way this out-of-work carpenter with a Grade Seven education always seemed to be boasting about his superior intelligence. "At the beginning at least, he seemed very earnest and wanted to be led by God," the pastor recalled. "But Rock was the type of person who claimed to know everything. He said that he used to be with the Knights of Columbus and that he had learned how to hypnotize people. I didn't ask him much about his past because we believe that God can forgive the past as long as we look to Jesus. But I knew that he'd been an alcoholic and it sounded like he had done a lot of bad things."

In May, Zita resolved to help Rock by getting him a job selling Seventh-day Adventist literature. He took him to the Montreal suburb of Longueuil, where the Church had its Quebec headquarters, and introduced him to Gabriel Saintus. As publishing director, it was Saintus' job to supervise the fifty or so "literature evangelists" across the province who marched from door to door selling books on nutrition, health, marriage and parenting. The books were a steady source of cash for the Church, and those who purchased them often proved to be ideal prospects for conversion.

A former backyard artisan, Rock may not have seemed the most likely of candidates for Saintus' program, but his marketing skills were undeniably sharp. Only the products were different. Instead of peddling tacky ten dollar beer mugs in rowdy taverns, Rock was waltzing around town in a suit and tie selling religious texts. His ID card, which featured a passport-sized black-and-white photo next

to a blue *fleur-de-lis,* identified him as "an official delegate of the Health and Home Service of Quebec," a Seventh-day Adventist front. Within weeks, he'd earned a reputation as one of the top-selling "literature evangelists" in the entire province. He was neat, polite and hardworking. Of course, Saintus thought to himself, he *was* a bit of a fanatic—but who was to say that was necessarily bad? The Church needed energetic, extroverted ambassadors to spread the news about Christ's imminent return.

By then, Prosper had baptized Gisèle, too, and she had started to accompany Rock on his sales missions. She marveled at his ability to ingratiate himself with complete strangers. As soon as a customer opened the door, Rock would break out in a broad smile, flash his ID card and strike up a conversation about the weather, the homeowner's taste—*Why, what a beautiful living room you have there, Madame*—or some other topic of dubious relevance. Within minutes, he'd have talked the otherwise sane individual into shelling out fifty dollars for a couple of self-help books.

Under the Church's commission structure, Rock was allowed to pocket up to forty per cent of the money he collected—a cut that sometimes ran into hundreds of dollars a week. Impressed, Zita decided that Rock would be an ideal person to help him administer another of the Church's therapeutic programs, a five-day course to help people quit smoking. Designed to purify the body as a prerequisite to spiritual health, the program consists of an alternating schedule of fasting, drinking spring water and fruit juices and taking doses of vitamins B and C. According to Church literature, the liquids absorb nicotine deposited in the body, while the vitamins supply energy to replace tobacco's effects as a stimulant.

Rock began teaching the course the way Zita showed him, one patient at a time. But his entrepreneurial instincts soon led him to adopt a more ambitious approach. Each time he talked his way into someone's house in the course of selling books, he'd glance around the room for ashtrays, packs of cigarettes and other telltale signs. Then he'd mention that *he* used to be a smoker, too, but—praise be to God!—he had hit upon the secret of how to quit. If the occupant evinced any interest at all, he'd say he or she was welcome to attend a free clinic he happened to be offering that very weekend. *Of course, you understand I'm not trying to pressure you. After all, it's* your *health.* For good measure, he'd sometimes reach into his jacket pocket and pull out a photograph of a cancerous lung, which he'd clipped from a government pamphlet.

The technique worked like a dream. Before long, dozens of would-be nonsmokers were showing up at Rock's meetings. And once they'd made the effort to turn out on a Sunday night, it was only a small step to enroll them in five-day group sessions to kick the habit. For Rock, it was a breakthrough—the Church and the seminars provided him with a cloak of respectability, and for the first time in his life he felt he had a platform that allowed him to call all of the shots.

Rock was not the only one delighted by his achievements. Praise for his missionary efforts poured in from other Church members. Saintus, Zita and Hermans each offered their congratulations, telling him that his strategy of using literature evangelism as a recruiting tool for five-day stop-smoking clinics was brilliant and innovative. They lauded his abilities as an organizer, and urged him to share his idea with other Adventists. Rock

drank in the accolades like a sponge soaking up water.

Soon enough, Hermans would come to regret the way he and his colleagues had boosted Rock's ego. He wondered whether the Church had done its new member a disservice by encouraging his seemingly uncontrollable desire to lead others.

CHAPTER 6

ALL GOD'S CHILDREN



[T]here are two things in the mind of the candidate for conversion: first, the present incompleteness or wrongness, the "sin" which he is eager to escape from; and, second, the positive ideal which he longs to encompass.

William James,
The Varieties of Religious Experience

In the early summer of 1977, a few weeks after Rock had launched the first of his stop-smoking clinics, Pastor Zita decided that it was time to save a few more souls. He studied a map to plan his next crusade and picked Plessisville, a town of nine thousand set in gently rolling hills fifty kilometers northwest of Thetford Mines. Once again, George Hermans announced the first meeting on TV. Meanwhile, Zita rented a meeting hall in Plessisville.

Fifteen locals showed up at the first meeting to hear Zita speak about mankind's failings, a respectable turnout in a province that remained a bastion of Catholicism. In the audience were three polite young women who had known each other from high school. They were accompanied by a shaggy-haired

man, Jacques Fiset, who looked to be a few years older than the women and already seemed to have a smattering of knowledge about the Church. It turned out that Fiset's parents were occasional viewers of Hermans' show and had written to the Adventists' Quebec headquarters for some literature. Their son was curious about the faith and had talked three of his female friends into joining him for the meeting. To Zita, the four seemed like decent, well-intentioned kids from solid Catholic homes who had grown dissatisfied with their religion and were searching for a stronger sense of spiritual identity. When the session wrapped up, he invited them to come back a couple of days later. They appeared ripe for conversion.

Driving in from Thetford Mines to meet them, Zita continued to see Fiset and the three young women—Solange Boilard, twenty-one, Chantal Labrie, nineteen, and eighteen-year-old Francine Laflamme—two or three times a week over the next month. He asked them what they wanted out of life, and they replied that they weren't quite sure but that there had to be more to this world than finding a well-paying job and sticking with it for twenty years so you could buy a fancy house and a big car. Gradually, Zita introduced them to the Seventh-day Adventist philosophy—how Jesus Christ was preparing to return to Earth and separate the righteous from the damned. He gave them all Bibles and drew their attention to the *Book of Revelation,* the last book of the New Testament. The message, Zita said, was inescapable: the deeper mankind sank into wickedness and depravity, the closer the world was coming to the apocalypse. The problems of the late twentieth century—wars, pollution, promiscuity and greed—were a sure sign that God would soon take revenge on what the Bible called

"the dogs and sorcerers and fornicators and murderers and idolators, and every one who loves and practices falsehood." *The Book of Revelation* prophesied that in the final battle between good and evil, famine, pestilence, earthquakes, giant hailstones, lakes of fire and swarms of locusts would torture sinners for months on end. But those who had refused to succumb to temptation would be annointed "priests of God and of Christ, and they shall reign with him a thousand years."

Towards the end of the crusade, Zita asked Rock to accompany him on his trips to Plessisville. Although the star salesman had been born only a few months before the preacher, to Zita he had always seemed older, and certainly more experienced in temporal matters. He felt that Rock would be a good role model. After all, just a few months earlier Rock had been a bankrupt alcoholic, an unhappy refugee from a broken marriage. With the Church's help and the Lord's blessing, he had been transformed into a pious and hardworking Christian.

Everything went according to plan. Rock sat with the four young people for hours at a stretch, talking about Judgement Day and the sins of the secular world. Their lives might seem empty and meaningless, he said, but if they followed his example they could make their time on this earth truly count for something. It was more than a matter of personal fulfilment. They could even assist others, just as he was teaching people to liberate themselves from the noxious effects of tobacco.

Solange, the prettiest of the girls and by nature rebellious, was the most skeptical of the quartet. But in Rock's intoxicating presence, even she became an attentive listener. It was flattering to think that three young women with no particular talents

could actually do God's work and help others. They could be special.

Soon both Zita and Rock were dropping by the young apprentices' homes and meeting their parents. The young pastor figured that it was only a matter of time before they would make a commitment and ask to be baptized. In fact, Zita was only half right. They *were* about to embark on a spiritual journey, but their destination would not be the Adventist church.



Solange Boilard was born on March 2, 1956, the youngest of four boys and three girls raised by Raoul and Laurette Boilard in Inverness, Quebec, a small agricultural community sixteen kilometers east of Plessisville down a picturesque winding country road dotted with turn-of-the-century farmhouses and maple-sugar shacks. Her parents were mainly dairy farmers, although they kept several horses and various other animals on their modest, three-field farm.

Raoul and Laurette were both forty-three at the time of Solange's birth, and as often happens with the baby in the family she grew up slightly spoiled. Even so, she was a bright, inquisitive pupil in grade school and brought home good marks. On weekends, she'd often play outside with her brother Gilles, who was a year older. Solange had four or five close friends at school, but her favorite playmates were the cats that lived in the long wooden barn which dwarfed the two-storey farmhouse. She adored the cats. She liked to bring them into the house and play school with them—setting them on chairs while she pretended to be the teacher. Her mother, Laurette, a soft-spoken woman no more than five feet tall, would stand in the door and

watch fondly. Sitting intently on the chairs, the cats seemed to be listening to Solange's every word.

Life on the farm, however, was not always easy. Solange's father, a tall, gaunt man with a shock of grey hair that hung over his forehead, worked his four sons hard. Visitors never saw him beat his children, but he cracked the whip when it came to the chores. And when the work wasn't done to his exacting standards, he unleashed a vicious tongue that could leave the unfortunate recipient of his vitriol reeling. Of the seven kids, only one, Doris, was said to be close to the father.

One by one, Raoul Boilard drove his sons from the home. Each quit school and left home at an early age. Clairmont, who was seven years older than Solange, was the first. He went out to British Columbia in his teens to work as a lumberjack, but died in a car accident only a few years later, in 1969. With Raoul's other boys unwilling to help him on the farm, he proved unable to maintain it. In 1971 he sold the place and moved the remaining members of the family to Lyster, a small country village nearby. He'd been a good manager of money and a notorious penny-pincher, which allowed him to retire with two hundred thousand dollars in the bank.

For the first fifteen years of the marriage, Raoul hadn't touched a drop of alcohol. But he took up the habit when Solange was still a toddler. In Lyster, with more time on his hands, Raoul's drinking problem grew steadily worse. He was a hard man, as hard on his body as he was on his sons. Every few months, he marched off to the local tavern and did not return home for several days. When he came back—or was carried home by his companions—before sobering up, he would go into fits. He'd tear into each member of his family, cutting them down with a barrage of cruel insults.

The binges always seemed to take place just before big family events—a summer vacation, a wedding or Christmas Eve mass—when it would destroy everyone else's plans. In later years, Solange would pour out her heart to friends, telling them how much she hated her father. She described nights lying in bed at the age of nine or ten, shaking in fear as her father raped her mother in the next room. For what seemed like hours, the house would be filled with drunken shouting and crying. Often, Solange would crawl into a closet, curl up in a ball and try not to make a sound, terrified that her father would find and hurt her.

Around the time the family moved to Lyster, Solange began traveling the fifteen kilometers by bus to Polyvalente La Samare, a sprawling collegiate institute and vocational school in Plessisville with an enrollment at the time of about 1,800 students. Her best subject in school was mathematics. After classes, she played intramural broomball—one of the few winter sports girls played in Quebec in those days.

At eighteen, Solange enrolled in a three-year business administration program at a junior college in Thetford Mines. She lived in a small apartment near the college and took the bus to her parents' house every weekend to be close to her mother. A slender girl with delicate good looks and long brown hair, she seemed to have few friends and never brought a boy to meet her parents.

By the second year of the program, her behavior began to change. She began to hang around with Jacques Fiset, a farmer's son who had grown up on the same country road as the Boilards. A few years older than Solange, he had a taste for the unconventional and had experimented with everything from marijuana to black magic. Solange started skipping

classes, and friends of the family mentioned to them that they suspected her of using drugs. "Once my husband and I went to a wedding and left Solange to babysit our two children," recalled Gisèle Martineau, Solange's oldest sister. "When we came home afterward, my brother-in-law warned us that he could tell by looking at her that she was stoned. I guess we wanted to pretend there wasn't a problem." Through Fiset, Solange gradually made two other girlfriends, Chantal Labrie and Francine Laflamme. Ironically, the three girls had gone to the same high school, but Solange was two grades ahead of the others. They were more acquaintances than close friends. What they shared, in addition to their teenage insecurities, was an eagerness to escape from their parents and their claustrophobic small-town lives. Jacques Fiset wasn't exactly sophisticated, but at least he offered a few cheap thrills.



Victoria Labrie remembers her daughter as a fragile child, "very delicate and emotionally sensitive." Born on March 30, 1958, Chantal was the second-oldest of six children raised by a devoutly Catholic family in Laurierville, a village ten kilometers from Plessisville. Her father, Rosaire, was a truck driver.

In her last year at Polyvalente La Samare, Chantal became sick with mononucleosis and missed several weeks of classes. A slightly gawky girl with a pointy chin and blue eyes that seemed to be set a mile apart, she began to take vitamin supplements and developed an obsession with health food. "I remember her as being extremely shy and introverted," said Gaston Nadeau, her Grade Eleven English teacher. She was the kind of girl who tried to slink into the corner of the room at every social occasion. Even among friends, she had a way of tilt-

ing her head to one side and staring blankly into space that reminded people of a frightened chipmunk. Lost in her own little world, she daydreamed about one day meeting a handsome stranger who would whisk her away and take care of her.

Next to Chantal, Francine Laflamme was a veritable exhibitionist. Her mother liked to say that she had "character"; others might have labelled her stubborn or bullheaded. Either way, she was talkative and bright, qualities that masked a deep inferiority complex about her appearance. She had a broad, flat forehead and a square jaw that made her look vaguely masculine. Hungry for the affection of boys at school, she quickly gained a reputation as a party girl. Friends said that she'd been sleeping around since she was thirteen or fourteen, and had experimented with soft drugs.

In the summer of 1977, Francine was still living at home with her parents, Gisèle and Jean Marie, and a younger sister and brother. She'd finished high school and was looking forward to enrolling in a fashion-design program that fall at a junior college in Sherbrooke.



One night late that summer, Rock turned up at the Labrie house to give Chantal a Bible lesson. While their daughter and a couple of her friends waited outside, Rock went inside and introduced himself to Chantal's parents for the first time as someone who had "seen and done everything in life except murder." Victoria Labrie didn't much like the sound of that. She couldn't make out if he was delivering a confession or trying to show off. Either way, it seemed like a pretty morbid thing to say, especially for someone who was marching around claiming to be a religious instructor.

The Labries liked to think of themselves as progressive parents, and the last thing they wanted to do was tell their nineteen-year-old daughter who she could and couldn't hang around with. Even if they tried, they felt, she probably wouldn't listen. But it didn't take long for Victoria Labrie to decide that Chantal's new mentor was a fraud. As they stood in the living room that night, she grilled Rock about his background and tried to get a fix on his intentions. "He talked to me about his beliefs for quite a while, and whenever he couldn't answer my questions he would kneel and chant and go into trances," she recalled. "From then on, I don't think he liked us. He knew we had figured him out."

Chantal had always been a moody, introverted kid, but her increasing contact with Rock only seemed to deepen her depression. She called Rock "master" and she began to carry a Bible with her at all times, clutching it like a talisman that would ward off evil spirits. Soon, Victoria Labrie noticed that her daughter was smiling less frequently and had stopped laughing. Something seemed to be tormenting Chantal. She was not the same girl they had spent nineteen years raising. They could feel her slowly slipping away.



Back in Thetford Mines, Gisèle Tremblay didn't know what to make of Rock's religious escapades. Every Saturday morning, he or Zita would drive over to Plessisville and pick up Laflamme, Labrie and Boilard, returning to Thetford in time for the 9:30 Sabbath service. The first time it happened, Zita had volunteered to put the three young women up for the night and then drive them back to Plessisville on Sunday. But the offer came too late. Rock, without mentioning a word to Gisèle, had already

convinced the trio to spend weekends at her one-bedroom apartment.

Solange, Francine and Chantal were intrigued by Rock and attracted to him. None of them had ever met a man who carried himself with such confidence. As a teacher, he was far funnier and more entertaining than anyone they had ever met at school. But there was also great depth to the things he talked about—God's blueprint for humanity and the decadence of modern civilization. What's more, he took an interest in them—their lives, their goals and their feelings. Talking to him seemed to open up a new world. According to Rock, the Adventist church had an important mission for them. They could teach people how to eat right, free themselves of hate and bring God into their daily lives. In their desire to drop out of mainstream society and spread a message of peace and love, they had much in common with the flower children and Jesus freaks of the sixties and seventies.

Rock too was flattered. He relished his new role as religious mentor, and basked in all the attention he was getting. And the relationship among them wasn't only spiritual. With Gisèle around, there was no question of having sex with any of the girls, but he sensed that it wouldn't take much to seduce them. For a man who had only recently escaped from a bad marriage, it was a powerful feeling.

Soon, Rock introduced another young woman to his fold. In many ways, Nicole Ruel seemed even more confused and insecure than the others. She had been born on May 20, 1957, to Fernand and Jeanne D'Arc Ruel of D'Israeli, yet another small community within a half-hour's drive of Thetford Mines. Nicole had always struck her family as a happy and industrious child until the death of her mother in October 1975.

She'd always been close to her mother, but after her death Nicole started to change. She dropped out of Grade Twelve and started to drink and use drugs —marijuana for certain, but her father also suspected stronger substances. Not long after that, Nicole moved to Thetford Mines. There were stories of pills, needles and prostitution. Then one day, Rock invited her to attend a stop-smoking clinic. Within days she was living at Gisèle's apartment. In the same month, Claude Ouellette, an unemployed twenty-four-year-old, had walked into a discotheque in his hometown of Victoriaville, twenty-five kilometers southwest of Plessisville. Since dropping out of high school after Grade Eleven, Ouellette had been knocking around aimlessly, living with his parents, and was thinking of attending an opticians' school in Longueuil that fall. That night in the summer of 1977, however, he was just out for a little action. A shy man with a slight build and a black moustache, he had a few drinks at the bar to screw up his courage and then approached a younger woman with a brazen smile and shoulder-length brown hair. She turned out to be Francine Laflamme.

Claude stayed close to Francine all night. She talked a little bit about the Seventh-day Adventist Church, saying she'd met a preacher recently and was taking Bible lessons with him. Claude had his own story. For five or six years after quitting high school, he'd been a heavy drug user, graduating from grass and hashish to LSD and the occasional injection of harder drugs like morphine. He wasn't an addict, he was quick to point out. He consumed drugs only to fit in socially. In any event, he'd been clean for a year. "I was tired of hanging out with the same old people and being stoned," he explained later. "I wanted to move on in life."

Claude was the kind of guy who would try anything, at least once. Drugs didn't seem to offer an answer, so he had enrolled in meditation classes and was trying out a diet of natural foods. Now Francine was suggesting that he come along to some of her Bible meetings. Claude thought about it for a minute and remembered that he had a cousin who had converted to the Baptist church, and that seemed to be working out fine. There was no harm in experimenting, he told himself. Besides, it would give him the chance to put the moves on Francine.

But Francine had other things on her mind. At the first meeting he attended, she introduced Claude to Zita. During the next session, they were joined by Rock, Solange and Jacques Fiset. Claude could tell that Francine was smitten by the charismatic evangelist, and as the evening progressed he began to feel the power, too. Listening to Rock's deep, mellifluous voice, he decided that he would give Adventism a shot. "It sounded like a good idea, like fun," he said. "My life wasn't in disorder. I just wanted to do something different and meet new people. Little did I know what I was getting myself into."



With each passing week, Gisèle's apartment became more and more congested. First it was Jacques Fiset and the three girls sleeping over on weekends. Then Nicole Ruel moved in full time. Pretty soon, Claude Ouellette started hanging around. As if that wasn't enough, Laflamme started bringing over a couple of her best friends from high school—Marise Lambert, who was eighteen, and twenty-year-old Josée Pelletier. Marise was an only child who lived with her mother and father, who ran a construction company, in Plessisville. Josée had known Francine for five years. Both girls were planning to move to Sher-

brooke in the fall to study at a private secretarial school.

Finally, of course, there was Rock himself—a man who, in less than two months, had become a magnet for six women and two men, all young and all hungry for a sense of belonging. It was almost as though Rock could not go down to the corner store for a bottle of fruit juice and some granola without bringing back another one of his strays.

Not surprisingly, Gisèle was becoming increasingly perturbed by the situation. A couple of months earlier, she'd been spending a lot of time by Rock's side, selling Seventh-day Adventist books door-to-door and helping to organize the stop-smoking clinics. But now she had so much housework to do, cooking and cleaning for all of Rock's hangers-on, that she hardly had time to get out for a breath of fresh air.

Most of the girls were living with their parents but they'd spend the weekend with me. Rock would tell them to make themselves at home. It was like it wasn't my place anymore. I had to prepare the meals and look after the girls as if I was their mother. Actually, I think some of them fell in love with Rock the first time they saw him—Chantal, Nicole, and Francine a little bit too. I never thought they were bad girls, just looking for some kind of new life because they weren't happy. They touched each other a lot, stroking each other's hair and giving massages. I liked it, but I didn't understand it. It wasn't exactly the way things were done in my mother's house..

And then the girls started to do the same thing with Rock, caressing him and rubbing his shoulders. Oh boy, that I didn't *like. I*

didn't agree with it at all, and I was getting jealous. But then I thought, Jesus Christ, my boyfriend wants to become a priest, so what am I worrying about? He didn't even smoke or drink anymore, and I felt sure he would never sleep with another woman. All the time, he was teaching me more about God and submission. He'd say that if I truly loved God I would open my door to all these women and try to help them. I guess deep down I always had the feeling there was something wrong with that, but my problem was always, Who do I believe? God or Rock? And he always said to me, "If you don't help these people, Gisèle, God will remember."

CHAPTER 7

THE NURSE



For generations of wealthy, blue-blooded Torontonians, the word Muskoka has conjured up recollections of dreamy, sunlit July afternoons, spectacular shorelines of wave-washed rocks and thick green forests carpeted with moss and pine needles.

A summer playground of the Canadian ruling class for more than a century, the Muskoka Lakes district, two hundred kilometers north of Toronto, was inhabited until the late 1700s by nomadic Indians living in tepees. The first white man to pass through the area was the great French explorer Samuel de Champlain, in 1615. Later, Jesuit missionaries from New France established outposts south of Muskoka in territory controlled by the Huron Confederacy. The area derived its name from an Algonquin chief, Mesqua Ukie, who signed two treaties surrendering the lake district to the British in 1815.

The first significant wave of white settlers, however, did not come until the second half of the nineteenth century. One of the most famous pioneers was Richard George Penson, a British lithographer who arrived from London in 1869. The following decades saw a boom in the tourist trade. Catering to

well-heeled Victorian families from Toronto, entrepreneurs cleared the bush and built lavish resorts complete with croquet lawns, dance halls and tennis courts. Penson was among the first to take advantage of the expanding business opportunities. In 1879, he opened a resort called Ferndale House on a high, rocky bluff overlooking Lake Rosseau. The hotel provided rest, recreation and genteel gaiety for several decades.

In 1926, the gaiety ended and the resort was taken over by the Canadian Keswick Conference, an interdenominational Christian organization that operated it as a religious retreat until declaring bankruptcy in 1976. Among the additions during that period was a terraced amphitheater for open-air morning services, carved into a slope on the north shore of the point overlooking the beach. When the main hotel burned down in the 1940s, the owners constructed a rustic, three-storey lodge with twenty guest rooms, terrazzo floors and dormer windows. A collection of sixty-one other buildings on the 217-acre site brought the total number of beds to over four hundred.

By the mid-1980s, the chorus of song and prayer had become a mere memory, drowned out by a fast-talking developer's dreams of ringing cash registers. In January 1984, Wayne Skinner, a thirty-four-year-old high-roller with a taste for white stretch limousines and expensive Swiss watches, held a press conference to announce plans for a twenty million dollar casino hotel on the site, which he and other investors had purchased a few months earlier for 1.3 million dollars. The soon-to-be-opened Lake Rosseau Village Inn was to be an adult amusement park true to the spirit of the hedonistic 1980s. The blueprints included plans for 5,600 licensed seats in sev-

eral restaurants, a discotheque and a Las Vegas-style showroom.

But Skinner's vision of a Vegas North quickly collapsed. A month before the scheduled ribbon-cutting, the Toronto Board of Education Staff Credit Union revealed that two of its administrators had extended more than eleven million dollars in unauthorized loans to the project. Crying fraud, the credit union cut off all financing to the resort and called in its lawyers. That forced Skinner to cancel his plans.

Every now and then, some starry-eyed developer steps forward to announce another grandiose plan for the Lake Rosseau site. But none has so far come to fruition. Almost a decade after Skinner's folly, the rusting steel-and-concrete hulk of his ill-fated fantasyland still rises out of the forest like the ruins of some lost empire.



Between 1976, when the Canadian Keswick Conference declared bankruptcy, and 1983, when Wayne Skinner moved in with his bulldozers and construction crews, the resort was the property of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Like the previous owners, the Church used it for religious conferences, but eventually found it too expensive to maintain.

The caretaker in those years was an Adventist pastor in his late fifties named Don Donesky. A good-humored Mr. Fix-It who carried both a plumber's and an electrician's license, he liked to boast that he could repair just about anything "except broken hearts and the break of day." It was just as well. Rarely did more than a few days go by without some aging pump or switch in the once-luxurious resort going on the fritz.

Still, Donesky cherished the Keswick site for its tranquility and natural splendor. He called the lush pine forest, the sparkling clear lake and the massive, two-billion-year-old rock formations that rose out of the soil and the water "the loveliest piece of real estate in the Muskokas." On warm summer mornings, the only sounds you could hear were the haunting call of a loon and the hypnotic lapping of the waves against the rocks below.

Of course, the place wasn't always so peaceful. During the ten-week-long summer season as many as four thousand day visitors would descend on the camp at one time, leaving Donesky and his crew of twenty-five rushed off their feet. When things were at their most hectic, it was conceivable that the first person with clean clothes and an honest face who turned up on his doorstep looking for a job would get one.

The month of July 1977 was one of those peak periods. So when two attractive French-speaking women in their late twenties showed up at the main gate toting backpacks, Donesky hired them on the spot as chambermaids.

Their names were Gabrielle Lavallée and Yolande Guinnebert. Of the two, Yolande spoke better English. She explained that the pair had been traveling for some months and were looking for a place to stay and a chance to earn some pocket money. Moreover, Yolande was herself a Seventh-day Adventist, while Gabrielle, a Catholic by birth, was developing an interest in Adventism.

Donesky did not regret his decision. The two young workers were neat, polite and diligent. They fit in well with the rest of the staff. He'd tell people that when the women had finished cleaning a room, you could eat off the floor.

There was something else that Donesky liked

about them. Right from the start, Gabrielle and Yolande plunged into Bible studies. They began to meet with Donesky regularly after work to talk about Seventh-day Adventist doctrine—how Jesus Christ would soon reappear in human form to inaugurate a one thousand-year kingdom of glory, how He would cleanse the world of all sin and complete the work of restoring man to God.

Gabrielle, a tall, graceful brunette with high cheekbones, soon began to talk about converting to Adventism. But Donesky wasn't convinced that the time was right. For one thing, he wasn't yet sure about Gabrielle's motives. It would be better, he said to himself, to wait a little longer and to continue the lessons.

I remember thinking there was a mystical side to her, a side she kept to herself. It was as though she was searching for something she could belong to that might offer her some protection. I suspected that there was something hidden in her past that I wasn't supposed to delve into.



It was only years later that Don Donesky's pupil would begin to come to terms with the mysterious, troubled past he wondered about in 1977.

The second youngest of thirteen children, Gabrielle Paquarette Lavallée was born on New Year's Eve 1949 in Chicoutimi, only a few kilometers from the village where Rock Thériault was living as a toddler. Her mother, Evelyne, and her father, Ovide, who worked at a pulp and paper mill, could not afford to raise her and so, almost immediately after her birth, she was sent to a Catholic orphanage in the nearby town of La Baie. According to

Gabrielle, who claims to have vivid memories of her childhood, the nuns there were stern and uncaring. They sometimes locked her inside a dark cupboard when she cried or refused to eat her porridge.

Gabrielle was three when her parents removed her from the orphanage. At first she was delighted to be with her family, but the young girl's joy turned to sorrow when she discovered that her mother, an intensely religious woman who ruled the home and ordered her husband to perform much of the housework, was as cold and austere as the nuns. What little love she had to give, Gabrielle complained, Madame Lavallée lavished on her younger brother. While Gabrielle cleaned the kitchen or worked in the yard, chopping wood, her brother played games and lounged around the house.

At that point in her life, events become murky. Over the years, Gabrielle has been extremely reluctant to discuss her upbringing, beyond telling friends that her father died of pneumonia when she was five. But in an interview with Paul Kaihla in February 1993, she recalled being in "psychological turmoil" at the time she arrived at the Lake Rosseau retreat.

Q: Why were you in turmoil?
A: Well, it is because of my childhood and the way I was raised. I came from a really dysfunctional family—I mean, even sexual abuse. . . .
Q: When you say dysfunctional, what does that mean? . . .
A: My father was an alcoholic. . . . When I started to explore my childhood in therapy two years ago, I was really scared because I felt something. And I said, "My gosh, I don't know when it's going to leave me." But I wanted to

do it. . . . So finally my unconscious mind, after a few months, started [to examine] the family pictures—dreams—to guide me to understand, to visualize the sexual abuse that I suffered. I could visualize the two persons very clearly. Of course, after that I passed through a really strong grieving process.
Q: You're saying you blocked those incidents from childhood out of your mind?
A: Of course. You know, when you're a child it's so traumatic. To keep your sanity, you use this sense mechanism to survive through that. A child doesn't know any better. You don't rationalize like an adult.
Q: Was this abuse at the hands of a family member?
A: My father and another man.
Q: I'm sorry to hear that.
A: But of course, I have been a victim all my life. . . . You have to cry [over] all the loss that was inflicted upon you when you were a child if you want the child inside of you to grow and to become an adult. So for two years that is what I have been doing, taking that child's hand and saying, "I am with you. Don't feel insecure. I will understand you and I am going to help you pass through that." Now I know for sure that I am a forty-three-year-old woman both in my body and in my mind. I am not this child anymore. I had to go that far to reach that part of the self that was gone and then to be able to get it back because I lost my identity when I was young. . . .
Q: Do you know how old you were when those events happened?
A: Yes, I saw myself as a little girl. I was four years old when those abuses started to occur.

Q: That's very young. . . .
A: Yes, I've been a victim all my life. Not only since the age of four, but since the first time that I breathed outside of my mother's womb. Because I even relived the birth—they call that the rebirthing technique. I did that on my own. I even saw myself in my mother's womb and felt how much I was rejected by her because she wanted a boy. And I knew that even in the womb I already felt rejected. At the last minute, because she was under anaesthesia, she didn't help me to get out of there. So I had to do it on my own. I had the choice right there to say, "Well, I can choose to die right here or to go on." And I said, "No." I am a strong survivor, because right there I decided to pass through the birth canal and go on with this life.
Q: Wasn't there anyone to help you or protect you when you were a young girl?
A: Who could have helped me? When things are like that, even your brothers and sisters are victimized. They are as victimized as the one who was abused because they are at home and they are confronted with it and they cannot do anything about it. And when they grow up, that is a subject they don't want to talk about because it's too painful to think about.
Q: Weren't there any neighbors or Children's Aid workers who could have helped you and your brothers and sisters?
A: I don't think that the Children's Aid Society existed in Quebec in those years. And I came from a very middle-class community. My family was not highly intellectual.

Gabrielle herself clearly aspired to greater things. In 1967, when she finished high school, she enrolled in a junior college in Chicoutimi to study nursing. By the time she graduated three years later, she had matured into a striking, seemingly self-assured twenty-year-old, with silky shoulder-length hair, high cheekbones and a studied air of superiority.

Licenced as a registered nurse on July 9, 1970, she immediately began working in the emergency department of a local hospital. But gradually she began to feel hemmed in by what she viewed as the narrow-minded provincialism of the Saguenay Valley. She was particularly unhappy with her personal life, having had an affair with a married man who, after stringing her along, refused to leave his wife. In 1972, she moved to Montreal and found a job in the cardiac ward of Royal Victoria Hospital. Within four months, the nursing director there asked Gabrielle to resign because she had mistakenly given a patient the wrong drug, an incident that could have proved fatal.

In Montreal, Gabrielle met and fell in love with a young Canadian diplomat. Not long after they began seeing each other, however, he accepted a posting in Spain. The lovestruck young nurse gave up her apartment to follow him overseas, telling friends that she was sure her handsome lover was going to propose to her. She was heartbroken when she discovered that he had no intention of marrying her—and, in fact, was already seeing other women.

Too distraught and embarrassed to return to Canada, Gabrielle travelled to Paris and began looking for work. Her last job as a nurse was a nine-month stint at a hospital in Neuilly-sûr-Seine on the outskirts of the French capital. She left there after quarrelling with the director. "That's where I gave up my profession for good because I was against the

abuse of drugs, the chemical therapy that was being given to patients," she recalled. "In a way, I had a kind of visionary approach to patients—today we call it holistic healing. So I started searching for myself. I travelled all over the place: Europe, South America, Central America and Mexico."

During her search, Gabrielle fell in love again, this time with a former heroin addict who occasionally smuggled marijuana and hashish to North America from Colombia. They lived for a time in Mexico and then Los Angeles, where Gabrielle began using drugs heavily and running up big bills. With her boyfriend's consent, she went to work as a stripper under the stage name "Foxy Lady." She was proud of her talents as a dancer and even enrolled in choreography classes to improve her act, but became depressed when she realized that the men who cheered and applauded during her performance had something other than artistic interpretation on their minds. Later, she broke up with the drug dealer, posed for a photo spread in a pornographic magazine and moved in with a nightclub owner many years older than her.

By then, Gabrielle had become deeply unhappy with her life. Sometime in late 1975 or 1976, she met up with a young woman from Normandy who had been among her closest friends in Paris, Yolande Guinnebert. Together, the two women decided to travel through Central America. They eventually wound up at a missionary health clinic in Guatemala, where Gabrielle, eager to adopt a healthier lifestyle, began studying alternative medicine, massage and chiropractic therapy. The place was run by a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Although Gabrielle had been raised in a strict Catholic home, she viewed her mother's religion as hypocritical and out of touch with the modern world. She

wasn't sure she agreed with everything to do with Adventism either, but she admired the Church's use of natural medicine, its philosophy of treating the mind and the body as one.

Before she finished the course, Gabrielle had a falling out with the pastor who ran the sanitorium —and left. Later, she complained that the man had been "too rigid," and had put pressure on her to become the clinic's head nurse.

Gabrielle and Yolande next found their way to Toronto. They spent a few months there, during which Gabrielle worked for an import-export business, but soon got the itch to travel again. Yolande mentioned that she'd heard about a Seventh-day Adventist retreat a couple of hours north of the city.



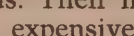
Around the time that Gabrielle Lavallée was heading north toward Lake Rosseau, Rock Thériault was bragging to Gabriel Saintus about the success of his book-selling expeditions and stop-smoking clinics. Impressed, Saintus invited Rock to join him at a week-long seminar he'd been organizing for the one hundred or so Church members across Canada who peddled Adventist literature. It would give Rock a chance to share his ideas with fellow Adventists and Church brass. The setting might also allow him to relax and unwind a bit. The conference, Saintus told him, was going to be held at a remote religious retreat in Ontario known among Adventists simply as "Keswick."

Rock was flattered and delighted by the invitation. Although he had taught himself as a youth to speak passable English, he had never before travelled outside Quebec. Now a worldwide organization was going to pay his expenses at a grand resort. Without consulting Saintus, he took the liberty of

asking along his band of young admirers. He wanted to show how important he was, and give them a taste of the experiences they could look forward to if they continued to hang around with him. On the day of the trip, Solange and one or two others climbed into Claude Ouellette's beat-up Chevy Impala for the ten-hour drive to Lake Rosseau. Meanwhile, Rock and Gisèle drove to Longueuil and joined Saintus for the rest of the journey.

Along the way, Saintus wanted to pay a visit to the Canadian headquarters of the Church, a plain, two-storey brick office building in Oshawa, just east of Toronto. As soon as Rock saw the place, he launched into a diatribe about the Church's spending practices, telling Saintus that the building was too extravagant for an organization that claimed to be God's instrument. After that, he began to sermonize about the personal lifestyles of Church executives like Saintus. Their houses were too big, their cars were too expensive and their bank accounts too fat.

Saintus couldn't believe his ears. *This guy has been a Seventh-day Adventist for less than six months, and already he's acting as if he has a monopoly on universal truth.*



Rock loved the scenery he found at Lake Rosseau. Before long, he launched into one of his rambling, buttery soliloquies about the majesty of God's creations. But even more tantalizing were the two attractive French-speaking women on the resort's summer staff. Rock immediately zeroed in on them. The first time they met, Gabrielle could feel his presence saturate the room, as if some kind of odorless nerve agent had been released into the air. Staring into his unwavering blue eyes, she instantly

felt as though he knew all of her secrets. He reached out to take her hand and introduced himself as the chief of the Quebec delegation, fully conscious of the effect he was having on her. "I felt something from his palm," she recalled. "It burned my hand. For a few seconds I just couldn't pull away. I wanted to, but it was like our hands were glued together. I remember thinking, this is a human being with a lot of charisma."

Rock seemed to grow even more interested in Gabrielle when he heard that she was a nurse. He told her it had always been his dream to help his fellow citizens by championing the cause of holistic healing. Why, his innovative anti-smoking clinics had already rescued hundreds of people from the evils of tobacco, and some of them had volunteered to join his crusade. Every now and then, Rock threw in a fancy medical term, as if he was worried Gabrielle would mistake him for a quack.

On the contrary, Gabrielle felt an indefinable calm in Rock's presence. Trusting him instinctively, she immediately poured out her story—her star-crossed love life, her drug use, her career as a stripper. She wasn't particularly proud of everything she had done, but over the years she had experienced many strange dreams and visions which seemed to indicate that there was a higher purpose to her life. Once, lying in bed at night, she had looked up at the ceiling and had seen a bright light, in which stood a man dressed in a tunic. That man looked remarkably like Rock. Surely, Rock and Gabrielle agreed, destiny had brought them together.

Later the same day, Rock took Gisèle aside and told her about his latest find. He assured her that she would be an invaluable asset to the group—an

experienced nurse who could assist them in performing God's work.

But when Gisèle finally met the young nurse a day later, she was not impressed. She saw a woman who was far too pretty and far from humble.

> *We were eating lunch and she came in and sat right beside Rock. He introduced her to all of us. But Gabrielle didn't seem to fit in. She was too smug, acting like I was just a little shit. We couldn't match her in anything. She had a higher education than everybody else and used all these big, fancy words. Rock asked me later what I thought about her. I answered, "I don't want to be friends with her. She's just a snob. Keep her for yourself." Rock was mad. I was the first girl in the group and he knew I had a big heart, that I was always trying to help others. I guess he wanted me to be Gabrielle's friend, to set an example for the others.*



All week long, Rock continued to work on Gabrielle to convince her to return with him to Quebec. He never left her alone. Gabrielle kept wavering. Even Gisèle, who wasn't exactly excited by the prospect of this new woman joining their entourage, had to admit that Rock was outdoing himself on this particular sales job.

On the final morning of the week-long seminar, Rock intercepted Gabrielle in the laundry room while she was folding bedsheets. He turned his charms on her for a full hour, but still she couldn't make up her mind.

An hour or two later still, word came that Gabrielle had relented. "I finally said to myself,

'Well, why not? I'm going to get involved with this man. And if at some point I find that it's not working out the way I want it, I'm just going to leave.' "

By the time she realized her mistake, it was too late. She would pay dearly for her decision.



Donesky never even had a chance to say good-bye to the young women he'd hired just three weeks earlier. Gabrielle just vanished into thin air, taking Yolande with her. He had no recollection of the man who had whisked the pair away.

Saintus, however, had been keeping tabs on Rock all week, and he didn't like what he'd heard. One particular incident stood out. Apparently Rock had wandered off from the hotel and climbed a rocky bluff to worship by himself. As he made his way up the hill he made a point of warning others not to follow him. He claimed he'd had a vision in which the sky had turned bright white and God had spoken to him. The ground he was about to kneel on, he said, was a sacred spot.

When Saintus heard about the incident, he thought immediately of the Biblical story of Moses. As far as he was concerned, Rock had crossed the line. He was acting as though he had some kind of personal contact with God.

CHAPTER 8

EXODUS



Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

Matthew 7:15

When he and his young followers returned to Thetford Mines, Rock had some practical problems to solve. To begin with, Gisèle was getting more and more uneasy about her boyfriend's interest in vulnerable young women, and tired of all those bodies and sleeping bags littered across the living room floor of her apartment. She was older than most of the others and wasn't so easily swept up by Rock's religious demagoguery. Privately she wished that he would devote less attention to God and more to her.

Gisèle was also becoming weary of Rock's constant preaching. All night long he'd nag the younger women to quit smoking and drinking, citing chapter and verse from the Bible. Occasionally, Gisèle would feel sorry for the girls and interrupt, pleading with Rock to give them a break. But instead of thanking Gisèle for her interventions some of the others would turn on her. Solange was one of the most rabid.

"Hey, who do you think you are?" she would

scold Gisèle. "Rock knows what he's doing. He understands more about the Bible than you do."

Gisèle grew more frustrated by the day. Perhaps she was just jealous of Solange and the others, but something told her it wasn't quite normal for a bunch of grown men and women to sit around on the floor of a tiny apartment all day and all night, nodding obediently as a woodcarver-turned-Bible-thumper lectured them about the need to clean up their lives and submit to God's will. Then again, these people didn't exactly seem normal. Nicole, for example, appeared to be little more than a tramp. And you only had to look at Chantal to see how screwed up *she* was. "She looks like a dead person," Gisèle complained to Rock. "She cries for nothing and she depresses everybody around her."

Nor was Gisèle getting along with the latest addition to Rock's entourage, Gabrielle. Since her arrival in Thetford, Gabrielle had scarcely stopped talking about herself, her expertise as a nurse and her exotic trips to far-off lands. She was the kind of person who could give vanity a bad name. And nothing anybody else did was ever good enough.

Moreover, Gabrielle was beginning to make her presence felt where it most assuredly was not welcome. Up until then, Gisèle had treasured the time she spent on weekends with Rock's two boys, Rock Jr. and François. She loved to fuss over them, tuck them into bed at night, give them kisses and read them funny stories—"just like a mother," she told herself. Not long after returning from Keswick, though, she walked into the bedroom and found Gabrielle and the two kids kneeling on the floor. Gabrielle was leading them in their prayers and talking about God in the same hushed, reverential tones that Rock liked to use.

Gisèle didn't know whether to laugh or cry. But

the more she thought about it, the more she burned with resentment at how this uppity nurse who spouted ten dollar words had intruded into her life and usurped her role. She was so mad she wanted to smack Gabrielle's stuck-up little face.

Finally, Gisèle told Rock that she was leaving him. She caught the bus to Quebec City and went straight to her parents' home in St. Joseph-de-la-Rive. Although her mother was cool and distant, her father was delighted to see her again. She didn't have the heart to tell him what was going on in Thetford Mines, but on her first night back home she lay in bed for hours sobbing into her pillow. She thought about killing herself. Yet every time she closed her eyes, she saw Rock's handsome, smiling face. Try as she might, she couldn't get him out of her mind. In the past eighteen months he had become such a dominant presence in her life that without him there didn't seem to be much left. She felt the kind of panicked loneliness that lovesick teenagers experience when they are separated.

A few days after her arrival, the phone rang. The second she heard Rock's deep, soothing voice she was overcome by a warm wave of euphoria, like a fix of heroin coursing through a junkie's veins.

"Gisèle, you know in your heart that you belong here with me," he told her. It occurred to her that Rock knew exactly which buttons to push to bring her back to him, but even so she felt powerless to resist. "I need you, and the boys need you. And you know how much we love you—you're the first woman I've ever loved in my life. You and I, we have so much to do for God. I can't continue my work without you."

Gisèle tried to bring up the subject of the other women and how she had come to feel like a stranger in her own apartment. But Rock had an answer for

everything. He explained, again, that he was only trying to help these young kids. They'd been brought up in unhappy homes where they were starved of affection—Gisèle more than anyone should be able to understand that. Now they were into drugs and who knows what else. If something wasn't done soon, the rest of their lives would be a mess. Perhaps if someone gave them a place to stay for a while, and helped them discover a better way, they would have a chance. Sure it was a bit of an inconvenience, Rock said, but think of the good he and Gisèle could do. Was that really such a high price to pay?

Gisèle felt selfish and ashamed. Rock was right, she told herself—those young people did need help. She packed her bags, hugged her father good-bye and boarded the next bus back to Thetford.

Rock's other problem was Pastor Zita. Months earlier, Zita had taken the new member aside, mentioned Gisèle and reminded him of the Church's belief in the sanctity of marriage. It was wrong, Zita said, to spend the night in the bed of a woman who was not your wife.

Not only had Rock obviously not listened, he'd now gone out and recruited an entire raft of *new* roommates.

"There was a whole bunch of them living in that tiny little apartment—Rock, Gisèle, Gabrielle, a girl from France, Francine, Chantal, Solange, Jacques Fiset, Nicole and sometimes Rock's two boys," Zita recalled. "People around town were wondering what was going on, and some of them started to speak against the Church. So I spoke to Rock. He said he was sleeping in his truck. Well, maybe he did now and then, but I believed he was living there in that apartment. I said that if they wanted to follow Christ, they had to follow every one of his prin-

ciples. But Rock didn't want to listen to anyone—including me."

It wasn't only the Seventh-day Adventist Church that was uncomfortable with the refugee-camp atmosphere in Gisèle's apartment. Solange Boilard's sister, Gisèle Martineau, was one of many neighbors and family members who suspected that something sinister lay behind Rock's religious facade. She knew that Solange and several of the other girls had been using drugs since high school. Now she was convinced—incorrectly, as it turned out—that they were supporting their illicit habits with prostitution. As far as she was concerned, Rock was nothing more than a sleazy small-town pimp, albeit a clever one.

There was also the small matter of the girls' education. That fall Solange was scheduled to enter her third year of the business administration program at Thetford's junior college. At the same time, Claude Ouellette was supposed to commence his opticians' course, Francine Laflamme was supposed to be studying fashion design in Sherbrooke and Chantal Labrie was supposed to begin her second year of junior college in Victoriaville.

But when September rolled around, not one of them showed any inclination to head back to class. Rock had convinced them that school was a waste of time. He quoted from *Ecclesiastes*: "Much study is a weariness of the flesh."

Zita objected, but to no avail. "Rock said that Christ was coming and when he arrived it wouldn't matter whether they were studying or not. I didn't agree with that. I felt that going to school was valuable and essential for a useful life. Even if Jesus Christ *was* coming soon, you wanted to get an education so that you'd be ready for Him to take you.

"I tried to talk to those people, but they were like

a lot of young men and women, in rebellion against authority and their parents. I guess from their point of view I represented the traditional path—respect for parents and education."

It must have crossed Rock's mind, too, that the young people he'd gathered around him might soon begin to think seriously about getting on with their lives. He clearly relished his new role as a living room guru and all-purpose guidance counsellor, but if it was to continue for much longer he would have to come up with some new reason for the group to remain together. Talking them out of going to school just wasn't enough.

At first, he pressed several of them into service as literature evangelists. But with Zita beginning to ask questions, Rock appeared wary of involving his young admirers too closely with Church leaders. In any case, Rock figured that *he* was the one who'd rounded them up. Hadn't Zita invited him to those early meetings in Plessisville because he wasn't capable of converting them on his own?

After pondering for a while, Rock hit upon a solution. He would continue to stage his stop-smoking clinics, only now he would introduce a vegetarian banquet at the end, relying heavily on Adventist-approved dishes like bean-curd casserole, lentil soup and carrot cake. That would give the women plenty of work to do and reinforce his constant reminders that they were members of a team. And if any of the guests felt like digging into their pockets after the feast and contributing a few dollars to continue God's work—why, it would be churlish to refuse. In fact, Rock figured he could get things started by making a "spontaneous" announcement that donations—cash or cheques, the Lord didn't care which—would be gratefully received. Of course, that was always *after* everyone had eaten and so might feel

guilty for having taken advantage of the group's boundless generosity.

Having saturated the Thetford market with his clinics and his books, Rock took his show on the road, like a snake-oil salesman in the wild west. Each week they would target a new town within commuting distance of Thetford, sell books door-to-door and distribute handbills. For good measure they would contact the editor of the local newspaper, who generally ordered up a story about the benevolent religious group that was in town to host a free stop-smoking clinic and vegetarian banquet. Usually, Rock managed to wheedle the use of a community hall or school gym at no charge for two or three hours each evening for five days. He would begin by telling the participants that they needed to purify their bodies by giving up meat for the next five days, drinking lots of water and eating plenty of fruits, vegetables and salads. Next, there would be a slide show to illustrate the harmful effects of smoking. There were also lessons on how to overcome the temptation to light up by taking cold showers or repeating positive phrases—in effect, a kind of stop-smoking mantra—at the onset of a nicotine fit. Finally, at the end of the five-day program, Rock would have the women cover a long table with salads and large platters of food. "The seminars were popular," Claude Ouellette recalled. "And when Rock gave them, he had the people laughing and kept them entertained all night long."

By all accounts, the sessions actually worked—as many as eighty-five per cent of the participants would kick the habit, if only temporarily. As word of the clinics' success spread, the turnout soared. At times fifty or even one hundred people signed up. Better yet, each of them donated an average of twenty dollars; some of the more gullible partici-

pants wrote cheques for as much as one hundred dollars. As an additional source of income, the group would set up a booth to sell overpriced natural-food items like sesame snacks and organically grown coffee—products that Claude or Rock himself would acquire by driving to Montreal or making the twenty-four-hour return trip to an Adventist natural-food supplier in Virginia.

All in all, it wasn't a bad way to make a living. Rock, a bankrupt beer mug salesman with a Grade Seven education, was hauling in two thousand or three thousand dollars a week with the help of a motley crew of college dropouts, druggies and a disaffected nurse.

Among the places on Rock's itinerary was Ste.-Marie, a town of about nine thousand that is among the oldest settlements in the Beauce region, south of Quebec City. When the group hit town one day in September 1977, the women fanned out to sell Adventist books door-to-door and recruit smokers for the planned clinic. It didn't take long before they found their first customer—a slim, wiry young man with straggly brown hair, a protruding lower lip and a wispy beard. He was holding a six-month-old baby girl and purchased a book on child-rearing because, he explained, he was worried about raising a child in such a chaotic world.

When he showed up at the clinic that week with his wife—like him, a non-smoker—Rock immediately singled them out as potential recruits. In conversation, Rock learned that he was Jacques Giguère, a twenty-four-year-old construction worker. His wife, Maryse Grenier, was a year younger and worked as a secretary for the town's main employer, the Vachon cake factory, which produced some of Quebec's favorite sugar-enriched junk foods. Quiet and introverted, she liked to stay

at home most of the time and cook, sew or watch television. When she did socialize, it was often because she wanted to keep an eye on Jacques in the local bars. Sometimes when he was out alone and came home late, she would erupt in a jealous rage, throwing objects around the apartment.

Jacques was more docile. Although he had a brown belt in karate, he was soft-spoken and sensitive. The fourth of thirteen kids, he had recently decided to build a house for his new family. But just before he started, his younger brother Yvon had been killed in a machinery accident on the family farm. Jacques, who had always been extremely close to Yvon, sank into a deep depression and cursed God for allowing the tragedy. Later, he would say he had lost his identity and was searching for some kind of meaning. Their spiritual quest had led both Jacques and Maryse to become vegetarians and experiment with fasting.

Jacques' encounter with Rock was like a revelation. He sat there, wide-eyed and spellbound, as the charismatic evangelist advanced his prescription for personal fulfilment through diet and prayer. In Jacques' mind the time flew by, and all the while, Rock sprinkled his spiel with jokes and anecdotes, flattering members of the audience like a seasoned politician. "I had never met someone with so much self-confidence," Jacques recalled later. "I believed and wanted to believe what he said."

Back in Thetford Mines, the families of Rock's young followers were becoming increasingly distraught.

Claude's parents spent hours trying to convince their son not to abandon his plans to study at opticians' college. But Claude wouldn't budge. He told his family that after years of bumming around aimlessly he'd finally found a new sense of purpose. In

reality, he might have gone back to school had it not been for his young man's sense of pride. At twenty-three, he would have been embarrassed to admit to Francine, Solange and the others that he was leaving the group because his parents wanted him to return to school.

Around the same time, in fact, Solange was announcing to *her* family that she was dropping out of business college in Thetford Mines to travel with Rock and her new friends. She told her mother that under the college's rules she had ten years to complete the program. Perhaps Solange expected that remark to reassure the sixty-four-year-old woman, but instead it filled her with dread. Laurette cried for days and worried that she would not see her daughter again for a long time.

Not long after that, Laurette Boilard suffered a nervous breakdown. For months afterward the diminutive woman would sit by her kitchen window every Friday afternoon and wait for the bus from Thetford Mines. It was as though she expected to see Solange hopping off with her bag of clothes for a visit, as she had done every weekend since leaving home to attend college.

If Solange's mother was disturbed, Chantal's parents were positively frantic. Victoria Labrie, who had distrusted Thériault from the moment she laid eyes on him, discussed her daughter's situation with the family doctor, who recommended they take Chantal to a psychologist.

"I took her to the clinic and left her with the doctor," Victoria Labrie recalled. "I thought the evaluation would take only a few hours, but when the doctor came out of his office he told me that Chantal had agreed to check herself into the hospital for a four-week examination. I was surprised

Chantal consented, but maybe she did it to make us happy."

The Labrie family's intervention was a watershed of sorts for Rock. Having Zita around to ask questions was bad enough, but the parents were becoming more and more of a nuisance. In addition, the group had outgrown Gisèle's apartment—there was simply no more room on the floor for new members to sleep. He decided it was time to pull up stakes. In Ste.-Marie, he'd noticed a For Lease sign on a two-storey clapboard building with a store on the ground floor and several bedrooms upstairs. Without telling anyone, he made the forty-five-minute trip to the Beauce one morning in October and arranged to rent it.

For several days he kept the news to himself. He didn't want to scare off his young followers by announcing that he was moving the group from the area where they'd grown up. But every now and then, he'd wonder aloud if it was time to open a full-time clinic. That way they could help even *more* people. Surely God would approve.

It didn't take long for the concept to catch on. Gabrielle, anxious to put her nursing skills to work, could hardly stop talking about what a marvelous idea it was. And Gisèle was all in favor because there would be more living space.

Finally, after about a week, Rock announced that he'd found a suitable place in Ste.-Marie. They could move there straightaway—as soon as they'd rescued Chantal from those cold, unfeeling doctors with their chemical therapies and fancy, electronic instruments that treated the body as if it was some kind of machine.

They all clambered into the truck and drove to the hospital. With all those familiar faces arrayed around her bed, and all those hugs, kisses and tears

of reunion, it didn't take Chantal very long to make up her mind. She was back in Gisèle's apartment within hours, helping to pack up for the move. By the time her parents found out that she'd left the hospital, Rock's truck, with everyone on board laughing and singing, was speeding toward Ste.-Marie.



If there was ever a happy time in the history of Rock Thériault's band of followers, it was in the Beauce.

Setting up the clinic seemed to give everyone in the group a burst of energy. They had a cause. They had embarked on a great new enterprise. Most viewed it as the first meaningful accomplishment in their short and otherwise paltry lives. On the day they erected their sign over the storefront—the Healthy Living Clinic—everyone felt a swell of pride.

"Belonging to the group was fun," Claude recalled. "We had some great times at the beginning, and Rock made us feel like we stood out from the rest of society. He talked about the chosen people in the Bible. We were to be the people of God."

Gradually, even Gisèle got into the spirit of things. She became almost a surrogate mother to the younger women, cheering them up when they were down and making sure that the clinic was clean and properly organized. She was proud of Rock and felt privileged to have him all to herself, as she knew that most of the others would have given anything to be in her place.

For the most part, the group got along well. Chantal, a virgin and the most withdrawn of the women, became particularly close to Nicole. A homely woman with frizzy hair and thick legs, Nicole had always been insecure around men and

compensated by becoming what young men would call an easy lay. Both women were extremely flattered by Rock's interest in them, and responded by falling in love with him. Often they competed with each other for his attention.

Francine, Josée and Marise Lambert were also close friends, as they had been since high school. Solange was the most strong-willed, and her inability to hide her emotions sometimes created sparks. She lost her temper easily.

But it was Maryse Grenier and Gabrielle who had the most trouble fitting in. Maryse made it clear that she had not wanted to join the group in the first place, and had done so only to comply with her husband's wishes. She followed Jacques everywhere he went, refusing to mix with the others.

By contrast, Gabrielle almost never left the rest of the group alone. She was constantly showing off her superior knowledge of medicine, and loudly pointing out the others' mistakes so that Rock would hear. She never stopped trying to impress him. One day, Rock was teasing Francine about her eyeglasses. He told her that they were a technological crutch, and that he could cure her short-sightedness with a holistic diet. That evening, when they were all gathered for dinner, Gabrielle picked up Francine's glasses from the table and broke them into pieces. Then she beamed at Rock, like a child looking for approval. His smile told the others not to complain.

While Rock encouraged such rivalries, he was careful not to let any of his followers feel too special. To reinforce the idea that they were all equal, he announced that everyone would wear similar outfits—something that would symbolize their rejection of society's conventions. Using Maryse Grenier's sewing machine, Gisèle made everyone a

loose, ankle-length cotton tunic that tied at the waist with a rope. The women's frocks were pale green, while the men wore beige. Rock's was dark brown, just like that of a Franciscan monk.

Another "convention" that Rock deemed unnecessary was that women should wear bras. Gabrielle thought it was humiliating and unfeminine to cover her body with a formless sack instead of proper clothing, but after a while she gave in. It was easier to relent than to endure Rock's reprimands about the evils of materialism.

Curiously, for a man who was always preaching the need to embrace modesty and humility, Rock seemed to be fixated on making money. Most weeks they were running two, sometimes three stop-smoking sessions simultaneously in different towns. Meanwhile, Rock was stockpiling the clinic with Seventh-day Adventist literature and natural foods brought in by the truckload from Virginia. People who walked in off the street with medical problems were invariably prescribed high-priced organic foods and vitamins, and advised to read books on holistic healing. By a happy coincidence, all of those items just happened to be available right there in the clinic.

As preposterous as the whole enterprise sounded, it was obviously fulfilling a need among the patrons of the clinic. In fact, several of them volunteered to help the group. One, Léo Marc Faucher, sold his house and all of the contents and joined the group with his wife and child. "I remember him placing a pile of money on the table and handing it over to Rock," Claude recalled. "There was maybe five thousand dollars on the table and he pushed the pile over to Rock as sweat was running down his face." It was a decision that he later came to regret.

After listening to Rock preaching for hours about

the importance of sharing with those who were needy, Jacques Giguère and Maryse Grenier also gave up their worldly possessions to move in with the group. They quit their jobs, gave up their apartment and sold a brand new Ford Econoline van and all their household furniture, giving Rock the proceeds.

Meanwhile, Francine had been working on her two best friends from high school, Marise Lambert and Josée Pelletier, who had briefly hung out with the group in Thetford but then gone on to secretarial college in Sherbrooke. In December, Marise Lambert announced to her stunned parents that she was quitting school, annulling her lease and going to work at the clinic. Josée followed a month later. "It's not like I was depressed or unhappy before I met Rock," Marise insisted. "I was an only child at home, and suddenly I found myself with a whole group of brothers and sisters, a lot of people my own age. There was a lot of energy from the group, and I think I really wanted the big family atmosphere. Also, Rock had a way of explaining things that made them meaningful. He could sell a refrigerator to an Eskimo. And it wasn't just because we were young. I saw him talk his way into deals with adults too, especially businessmen."

The arrival of several new members during the fall and winter only increased Gisèle's feelings of jealousy. Although Rock never so much as touched another woman in her presence, she knew that most of them were head over heels about him. Gisèle was twenty-six and was beginning to wonder if Rock had ever given any thought to their future. Every time she raised the subject, he told her not to worry—she was the love of his life. But if something didn't happen soon, she feared she would be in danger of losing him to Gabrielle or to Francine.

Gisèle finally gave up waiting and proposed to Rock just before Christmas.

His immediate response didn't seem very promising. "Are you crazy?" he asked, laughing. But he didn't come right out and say no.

A week later, he gave Gisèle the answer she'd been hoping for. Then he organized a meeting with the group to break the news. That was the part Gisèle *hadn't* been looking forward to. She knew that some of the others would be envious of her. Sure enough, Gabrielle sat at the kitchen table burning with jealousy. Since their meeting the previous summer, she had been praying to God that Rock would marry *her.*

The wedding took place on January 8, 1978, at Beer Sheba Church in Montreal, with Pastor Nathan Prosper presiding. Everyone from the clinic attended. Instead of taking off for a honeymoon, Gisèle and Rock immediately piled into the truck with the whole troop for the five-hour drive back to Ste.-Marie, with Claude at the wheel. All the way, Rock was laughing and joking with Solange, Nicole and the others. The whole thing seemed so perverse, so unlike what she'd imagined her wedding would be, that Gisèle lay sobbing on a mattress in the back of the truck. Feeling rejected, she began to suspect that the marriage had been a farce, a public relations gesture designed to impress the Adventist Church so that Rock could ensure a steady supply of books and health food.

As it happened, the Church was not impressed. Zita had already tried to separate Gisèle from Rock, offering to enroll her in a course on psychology at the Adventists' Quebec headquarters in Longueuil. Gisèle appeared interested, but as soon as Rock learned of the offer he put a stop to it. Zita also

visited several of the girls' parents to tell them of his conviction that their daughters' mentor was becoming increasingly unstable. From then on Rock tried to keep Zita as far away as possible.

I tried to meet with them when Rock wasn't around, but he was always there. He used to say, "Watch out, the wolf is coming," referring to me. Even when he went out, he took them all with him in his truck. He never let them out of his sight. He said God had told them what they could do in life—help people stop smoking. We wanted to break the power he had over the girls, but it was difficult because Rock overpowered everything.

The other problem I had with him was the money. I felt that the profits should go for humanitarian activities, but Rock wanted to keep it all for himself. When I reminded him that I was the one who had showed him how to run the stop-smoking clinics, he said, no, it was God who taught him. I had merely been God's instrument.

There was no way to argue with him, really. He would just sit there and look at you, close one eye and focus on you with the other.



Others, too, were becoming outraged by Rock's recklessness. Maryse Grenier's parents had complained to the Ste.-Marie police force about the influence he seemed to be wielding over the group. By coincidence, the cop assigned to the case was a former childhood sweetheart of Maryse, a strapping, twenty-five-year-old rookie named Sylvio Bety. He drove round to the clinic and was greeted at the door by Rock, dressed in his long brown tunic. Rock

offered him coffee and acted so friendly that Bety couldn't help but think Rock was trying to recruit him. But he never managed to speak with Maryse and Jacques. "I could see them roaming around in the background, wearing the robes, but they never approached me. They let Thériault do all the talking," he said.

As the next few weeks went by, a steady parade of Ste.-Marie merchants filed into the small, antiquated police station to complain that Rock was running up unpaid bills. "Some people wanted us to lynch him," Bety recalled, "but he hadn't broken any municipal laws. We couldn't do anything about his bad credit rating." Nor was there any sign that he was forcibly holding any of his followers. The parents could complain all they wanted, but if their sons or daughters chose to give up all of their worldly possessions, or drop out of school, that was their right. There was no law forbidding Rock from presenting himself as a spiritual leader.

In March, the police had reason to check up on Rock yet again. A local resident, thirty-eight-year-old Geraldine Gagné Auclair, was being treated for leukemia in a Quebec City hospital when her husband met Rock. With the husband's consent, Rock went to see her and became embroiled in a shouting match with the hospital's cancer specialists, accusing them of using too many drugs. Later, he convinced Auclair's husband to release her from the hospital and take her back to Ste.-Marie. He promised to cure her with a diet of health foods.

Eddy Auclair, the feisty Thetford city councillor who had seen Rock in action two years earlier, was Geraldine's brother-in-law.

I'd visited her in the hospital and she seemed to be doing well. When I was prepar-

ing to return three or four weeks later, her father told me she was in Thériault's clinic in Ste.-Marie. I almost went crazy. Her father told me that he had recently been to see Geraldine, but Thériault would not let him in. She died that day. I was shocked and angry. The whole time Geraldine was there, Thériault would not let her own father come in.

I was told that Thériault tried to heal her with grape juice and natural products. I don't know what he did or how much he charged the family for those treatments. But let me tell you, if I had known earlier that she was there I would have gone to the clinic myself at night or brought the police in—whatever it took to remove her. It still pains me to think about it. It took me years to get over her death. She was such a wonderful woman. To think that she more or less died in Thériault's arms makes me sick to my stomach.



The police investigated, but could find no evidence that Rock was responsible for Auclair's death. For his part, Rock told his followers that he had gone into Geraldine's room and, miraculously, brought her back to life briefly with a kiss. "I gave her the breath of life, and she opened her eyes and smiled," he said to his wide-eyed flock. To explain why he had not succeeded in saving her, he added, "You know, when God wants people, he takes them. It was Geraldine's time."

Another terminally ill patient who took up residence in the clinic around that time was Gabrielle Nadeau, whose parents had met Rock at a stop-smoking clinic. When Rock found out that their nineteen-year-old daughter was bedridden at a local

hospital with multiple sclerosis, he talked them into assigning her to his care. He assured the Nadeaus that his holistic therapies would do far more for Gabrielle than the doctors with their impressive-sounding degrees and expensive equipment.

A month after Auclair's death, Zita and several other Adventist pastors convened a meeting and voted Rock out of the Church. In their view, Rock had failed to bring any of his young followers closer to God; he had merely drawn them to himself. It was a power that could easily be abused.

The loss of his Church membership had little effect on Rock, however. On the contrary, he got it into his head that it would be a good idea if several other group members also got married; it would discourage them from straying outside the circle. In short order, and despite the fact that Rock had no authority to conduct weddings, he married Jacques Fiset to Nicole and Claude Ouellette to Solange. It hardly seemed to matter that none of them had expressed any interest in marriage before Rock planted the idea. Claude warmed to the idea, but Solange was frosty. The memory of her father had bred in her a deep suspicion of men and marriage. Nicole, on the other hand, didn't mind getting married—but she felt it was to the wrong man.

The day before she wed Claude, Solange phoned her mother, announced that she was about to be married and invited the family to attend. The next morning, a Sunday, the troubled Boilard clan went to Sunday mass and asked the parish priest for advice. He recommended that they attend the wedding, even though it wasn't being held in a Catholic church, just to show Solange that they cared about her. Solange's parents, along with Gisèle Martineau

and two brothers, immediately drove to Ste.-Marie and arrived just in time for the ceremony.

Gisèle Martineau found the whole affair bizarre.

> *Thériault performed an elaborate speaking ceremony. It was a bit ridiculous, and we found that some of the things he was saying were strange and out of date. He stressed how the woman had to be submissive to the man. Well, that didn't sit very well with the women in our family. Several of us sobbed during the ceremony. Believe me, they were not tears of joy. Claude's father told us at one point to stop crying—we didn't appreciate that. But Claude himself didn't seem like too bad a guy. He was not the aggressive type. He seemed very gentle, so that comforted us somewhat.*
>
> *After the ceremony, we sat down to supper. They served us each a large plateful of one of their vegetarian dishes, scooped out of a huge pot. To tell the truth, it looked like mud, but we ate it anyway.*



Despite his newfound enthusiasm for the joys of marriage, Rock's own record was dismal to say the least. According to Gisèle, he displayed little physical affection for her after their wedding. They rarely had sex, in part because most nights he was up until two or three in the morning talking with the other women. And when they did have intercourse, Gisèle found the experience confusing. She kept telling herself that she loved Rock, but the intensity of her attachment was now matched by a smouldering sense of rejection. "I think he only slept with me to shut me up," she recalled. "I don't think he even

liked me. I made love with him the way you would make love to a fridge." Finally, that spring, pregnant with her first child and fed up with having to share her husband's attention with a houseful of people, Gisèle threatened to leave Ste.-Marie and return to her father's house for good. Alone with him in the bedroom one night, she told Rock, "I don't want to live with all these people—all of your rats."

This time, Rock didn't bother to assuage her distress. Without so much as a word, he ploughed Gisèle in the face with his right fist, leaving her mouth bloody and swollen. Two days passed before he allowed her to leave the room.

CHAPTER 9

CALL TO THE MOUNTAIN



Every man is inclined to be obedient. He desires further to conform to the values of some group he perceives as strong and influential. If this group emphasizes the value of raw emotion and the rejection of identity and intellect then he will soon experience heightened suggestibility. Closure will occur around any remaining ideas he might previously have found distasteful. Then, purified and confident, he will begin to act, not for himself, but for the group.

Andrew Malcolm,
The Tyranny of the Group

The early morning of Monday, June 5, 1978, was a hectic one at the Healthy Living Clinic. A few days before, Rock had conducted an exhaustive review of the company's operations. Revenues were up and staff morale was for the most part excellent, but the prognosis for the next quarter was grim. To begin with, there was a serious inventory problem: having kicked Rock out, the Seventh-day Adventist Church was no longer willing to supply him with literature and natural-food products. Then there

was the matter of the local merchants, who were practically banging down the door to collect on unpaid bills. Last but by no means least, the unfortunate death of Geraldine Auclair had been a public-relations disaster. The local police seemed to be maintaining something of a stake-out around his company headquarters. Having weighed the pros and cons carefully, Rock opted for a corporate relocation.

True to form, Rock kept his followers in the dark about his ultimate intentions. He simply voiced his opinion that the group should begin to carry its good works to areas beyond the Beauce. They could go on the road for a few weeks, he suggested, staging seminars and vegetarian banquets in fresh territory. Along the way, they would scout out a new site for the clinic.

In the pre-dawn hours, the group—including recent arrivals, there were six men, twelve women and two children—busily loaded all of their belongings into Rock's truck, an old school bus and a car, each of which they'd painted blue with white letters on the side spelling out the clinic's name. They clambered into the vehicles and managed to roll out of town before first light.

Constable Bety was one of the first to notice Rock's absence. "We got up one morning and they were all gone—poof—just like that. I guess the social pressures, not just from the police but from residents here, became too much. Some people figured they must have all been drugged or under hypnosis."

Pretty soon, worried parents of Rock's followers began lodging missing-persons reports. Police forces across the province were notified and asked to be on the lookout for the caravan. The first clue came in a report from Rivière-du-Loup, four hundred kilome-

ters northeast of Ste.-Marie. Police there found a large canvas bag on the shoulder of the Trans-Canada Highway containing bankbooks, personal ID and other documents belonging to group members. When he heard the news, Sylvio Bety figured that Rock and his gang had decided to drop completely out of society.

After Rivière-du-Loup, the traveling medicine show cut away from the Trans-Canada and headed along the south shore of the St. Lawrence toward Quebec's remote and sparsely populated Gaspé region. They held stop-smoking seminars in Matane, Cap-Chat, Ste.-Anne-des-Monts, Marsoui and Rivière-à-Claude, before cutting south across the Chic-Chocs mountains to New Richmond, near the New Brunswick border.

It was in New Carlisle on July 6, a month after leaving Ste.-Marie, that Rock seemed finally to make up his mind about the group's future course. He told them how, in the *Book of Revelation*, the seventh angel had unleashed the wrath of God upon the earth. There were flashes of lightning, peals of thunder and a great earthquake that toppled mountains and cities. Then "great hailstones, heavy as a hundredweight, dropped on men from heaven until men cursed God for the plague of the hail."

The Biblical prophecy, Rock said, would come true on February 17, 1979. That was the bad news. The good news was that God had appointed Rock to be his personal emissary. He and his disciples were to escape the evils of civilization and return to nature. They were to be the core of a new society that would usher in God's thousand-year reign.

According to Gisèle, "Rock said we should make our own life in the bush—we didn't need the Adventist Church and we didn't need the rest of the world. He said that our lives would be better if we

were surrounded by nature, where we could live in peace and quiet. He put that conviction in our minds. I believed him, and everybody else agreed, too."

Three days later, the group set out on foot through the bush from the village of Saint-Jogues, a half-hour's drive inland from the Atlantic coast, in search of Rock's promised land. They found it two days later near an isolated foothill by a small body of water with the intriguing name Lac Sec (Dry Lake). The site was twenty-two kilometers north of Saint-Jogues and a four-hour walk to the nearest road. Rock, with his penchant for overstatement, christened the scrub-covered mound the "Eternal Mountain."

Pitching tents in a clearing, they spent the first week trudging back and forth to the spot on the roadside where they had left their vehicles, lugging in heavy tools, cooking utensils and huge sacks of supplies as if they were pack mules. Rising at 5 a.m. and working until well after sunset, they cut down trees with a chainsaw and began to construct a crude octagonal log cabin to Rock's specifications. Using a pickax and a shovel, Jacques and Claude hacked away at the ground all summer long, digging a well in the middle of the cabin. When they finally hit water, Rock declared it was a "miracle." Meanwhile, the other members were busy hauling rocks to make a large stone fireplace, or tending to Gabrielle Nadeau, the multiple sclerosis patient, as she lay immobilized in a small tent. "At the beginning there was nothing, just a piece of land," said Gabrielle Lavallée. "Nobody had experience in hard work—and I mean, this was *hard* work. We worked just like pioneers. We arrived in July and we had to build in a rush so we'd have shelter from the com-

ing winter. It was long, long, long hours of work among mosquitoes and bugs."

Rock exempted himself from most of the hard labor, claiming that his stomach problems and his cancer made it dangerous for him to exert himself. Even so, he showed little concern for the comfort and dignity of others. Early on, the men found themselves tripping over their ankle-length tunics as they tramped through the bush carrying six-meter-long logs on their shoulders. When they complained, Rock told them to hike up their hemlines. Before long they were wearing navy-blue wrap-around tunics that resembled mini-skirts. On the rare occasions when the group made the long trek into town to pick up groceries or building supplies such as mortar and wooden shingles, the locals could scarcely believe their eyes.

The rough terrain made bringing in food difficult, so Rock introduced rationing. "We never ate breakfast," Claude recalled. "Thériault would have the women bring us a small lunch portion, but barely enough to keep us going. We were always hungry, always hoping we'd get our fair share at supper-time. And we knew if we disobeyed his orders we'd be punished by receiving smaller portions. Food was constantly on my mind."

By September the cabin was ready, but it was hardly a refined environment. The floor consisted of round slices of wood cut from tree stumps and pounded into the earth. The ceiling was nothing more than bark-covered spruce and birch logs, from which dangled moss, leaves and twigs. A single open room housed the kitchen, the fireplace, the well and a large kitchen table. Every night, the commune members slept in bunks set against the rafters at opposite ends of the cabin and separated only by

meter-high wooden partitions and a few, thin bed sheets hung from the roof as curtains.

That same month, to symbolize the group's break from society, Rock assigned Biblical names to each of his followers based on their ancient meanings. His wife, Gisèle, became Esther ("star"); Solange became Rachel ("lamb"); Gabrielle became Thirtsa ("charmer"); Francine became Hogla ("partridge"); Nicole became Debora ("queen bee"); Chantal became Ruth ("companion"); Josée became Noa ("comfort"); Marise Lambert became Sara ("princess"); Maryse Grenier became Rebecca ("ensnarer"); her husband, Jacques, became Nathan ("what God gives"); Claude became Boaz ("the one with strength"); Gabrielle Nadeau became Machla ("beauty"); and Jacques Fiset became Josuah ("of whom God is salvation"). Having led his tribe into the wilderness at God's instruction, Rock decided to name himself Moses.

(As things became stranger, several others left the commune. Yolande Guinnebert returned to France, explaining that her passport had expired. Léo Marc Faucher, who had given Rock his life savings, loaded his few remaining belongings into a horse-drawn wagon and walked off with his wife and child. Rock made no attempt to stop them, but told the others that Faucher was evil.)

When they weren't working like slaves, Rock lectured his flock about the decadence of modern civilization. To purify themselves they first had to recognize that society was corrupt and evil—Rock called it "the world of the dead." Their families were among the worst transgressors. Night after night, Moses coaxed his hungry and exhausted followers to bare their secrets and discuss their troubled childhoods. As the list of grievances grew, he replayed them over and over again as evidence that

their parents were agents of Satan. Now, deep in the bush and safe from society's depravity, they had a new family. Rock was the father, Papy. Gisèle was their mother, Mamy.

"Thériault entrenched this image in us," Marise Lambert remembered. "We were not allowed to speak of any happy family memories. We always tried to denigrate our parents because our parents were supposed to be bad. We had to try and forget them. Our parents didn't give us good things. Anything that was good had to come from Rock."

There *were* many good times. Often at night, Rock would entertain the troupe with outlandish skits like the stunts he used to pull while traveling around the province with Gisèle. He liked to dress up in a turban or a biker's leather jacket, or grab a hose and pretend to be a lounge singer crooning into a microphone. Sometimes the entire group got dressed up in wigs or clowns' costumes to act out plays directed by Rock. The unrestrained merriment made them feel like children again. Laughing, shouting and singing at the top of their lungs, they could feel their inhibitions slipping away.

The hunger, sleep deprivation and constant frenetic activity left Rock's followers even more vulnerable to suggestion. "We really believed that he was a representative of God," Gabrielle said. "I remember listening to him at one point and thinking there was something strange going on here. I told myself that I had to find five minutes the next day to think about it. But there was never any time."

On the surface, it seemed simple: a dominant figure taking advantage of a collection of weak-willed acolytes. But on a deeper level, Rock and his followers had developed a kind of mutual dependence. His entire adult life had been spent trying to impress others and gain their approval. Now he was sur-

rounded by a group of people whose admiration for him knew no bounds. In their weakened states they had come to depend on him for the necessities of life. Driven by feelings of worthlessness and self-doubt, they sought to submerge their own identities in a more powerful and glorious entity. The harder Moses drove them, the more they sought shelter under the umbrella of his strength. It was as though the very act of suffering reinforced their psychological bond to Rock, just as their abject subservience supported his claim to be their absolute master. They needed him as much as he needed them.

As the obsequiousness of his followers fueled his delusions, Rock's obsession with religion became more intense. He seemed to find precedents in the Bible for every aspect of the group's existence. He even grew a long black beard which, with his flowing robes, gave him the appearance of an Old Testament patriarch. His favorite passages in the Scriptures were the stories of King David and King Solomon, epics filled with violence, intrigue and calamity—and a seemingly unlimited supply of concubines.

It wasn't long before Rock decided that it had been selfish of him to withhold his sexual benefaction from the other women in the group.

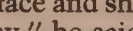
The turning point came in October after Gisèle, who was six months pregnant, mentioned to Rock that several of the unmarried women were lonely. Since the founding of the clinic back in the Beauce, he had forbidden the single men and women in the group to sleep with each other or to mix with outsiders. "Finally I went to him," Gisèle recalled, "and said, 'Rock, it's not normal. Those girls need men, and the men need women.' He looked at me strangely. And after that he went to the girls and said, 'You know, Mamy said you need men. You

can't survive without men—it's the law of nature.' He put it in their minds that it was my idea."

A few nights later, Nicole—whose "husband" Jacques Fiset had never shown much interest in her—told Gisèle that she'd had intercourse with Rock in one of the lofts, while everyone else was working outside. Devastated, Gisèle ran off into the bush crying, with Rock in hot pursuit. He caught her, threw her on the ground and began to choke her. His eyes were wild with rage.

"My name is Moses and I am your master," he screamed. "You will obey me. If you don't do what I tell you, the Lord will crush your skull."

When Gisèle protested, Rock yanked her upright, shook his fist in her face and shouted an ultimatum. "You can go that way," he said, pointing in the direction of Saint-Jogues, twenty-two kilometers south, "or you can come with me back to the camp." Physically drained and convinced that her husband would kill her rather than allow her to flee, Gisèle hobbled back to the commune, tears streaming down her face.



While Rock Thériault was building his doomsday sanctuary in the remote Quebec wilderness, another charismatic leader was preparing his followers for the end of the world in the jungles of Guyana, on the northern coast of South America.

In several important respects, Jim Jones' life resembled Rock's. Born in 1931, Jones was raised in rural Indiana. As a boy he was a natural leader, gathering friends around him and telling them what to do. He complained years later that his father, a right-wing religious fanatic and member of the Ku Klux Klan, had beaten him unmercifully. To impress his friends, Jones falsified the family history,

claiming that his mother was an American Indian. At school, he was quiet and received good grades. When he graduated from high school, where he'd earned the nickname Doc because of his ambition to be a doctor, the yearbook said of him, "Jim's six-syllable medical vocabulary astounds us all."

Instead, Jones became a preacher. His first assignment was with a Methodist church, but he left after a few years to found a church of his own, the People's Temple. Identifying with society's outcasts, he developed an obsession with power. He insisted that his parishioners call him "Father" and his wife "Mother." He also became a hypochondriac, convinced for the remainder of his life that he was stricken with cancer.

In 1965, Jones announced to his congregation that the world would be devastated by nuclear war on July 15, 1967, and it was therefore necessary to find a safe haven. He led about seventy families to a small town in northern California, saying God wanted them to begin life anew and create a utopian society.

When the predicted Armageddon failed to materialize, Jones moved his flock to San Francisco. Increasingly dictatorial and manipulative, he confided to a friend that he preferred sex with younger women, whom he was able to dominate more easily than his wife. Before long, he'd appointed one of his secretaries to arrange for female church members to sleep with him. Some of the women complained that Jones was sadistic.

Jones maintained discipline among his followers by keeping them so tired and so hungry that they had little energy to complain. He also beat them with whips or paddles for such infractions as smoking or falling asleep during one of his sermons. Swinging wildly between fits of violence and pater-

nal affection, he eventually became so paranoid that he interpreted even the slightest criticism as a deep personal affront. One of his favorite mind-control tactics was to cajole people into publicly confessing their weaknesses, and then use that information against them. It was a technique that had been refined by the Chinese Communists in the 1940s and 1950s in an attempt to remold workers to conform to party dictates.

Amid growing criticism of his methods, Jones moved his congregation to Guyana in 1977. He boasted of creating a socialist utopia, but as time went by, he began to rail about dark forces that, he claimed, were out to destroy his experiment in communal living. Rather than submit, he decided to close it down himself. On November 18, 1978, Jones and some nine hundred of his followers died in an orgy of mass suicide and murder.

In the aftermath, hundreds of psychiatrists and government-appointed investigators attempted to come to terms with the Jonestown tragedy. It was true that some of his followers were mentally unstable, but many others came from healthy, affluent backgrounds and showed no signs of deviant personality traits. "In some cases," one government inquiry concluded, "the young People's Temple member had been alienated by the 'emptiness' of his family's wealth." The common denominator seemed to be a yearning for community, structure and meaning. For lonely people, the cult offered indiscriminate friendship. In a world of rapid change and bewildering choice, Jones' religious order represented an escape from freedom. Abandoning all previous obligations to their jobs, families and society, the cult members' only responsibility was to obey their leader.

According to survivors of the massacre, the power

which Jones displayed over his followers was itself one of the strongest reasons for their commitment to the People's Temple. The more sacrifice he required of them, the harder it became to renounce Jones; it was as though they had invested so much of their personalities in him that they could not bring themselves to walk away. Like the disciples of certain Indian gurus or Zen masters of China and Japan, they lapsed into an infantile state of simplicity and dependence. Even in those ancient traditions it was not unusual for paternalistic teachers to inflict pain on their devotees as a means of enlightenment, just as a parent might spank a misbehaving child "for his own good." According to the British Buddhist Christmas Humphreys, there are numerous cases throughout the centuries of Zen masters beating their pupils and ejecting them from the monastery. The disciples invariably returned, not to complain about their treatment but to thank the master "for the violence which sent him back into the deeps of his own mind."



Rock Thériault followed the news of the Jonestown massacre with morbid fascination, listening to reports on the radio and glancing at newspapers every time he went to Saint-Jogues. After a few days, he informed Gisèle and the others that he'd had a vivid premonition of the tragedy in a dream the previous year.

The massacre in Guyana had an immediate effect on the Gaspé commune. Suddenly, cults were the focus of worldwide concern. Quebec's French-speaking media were falling over themselves to report on the thirty-one-year-old Moses who had led a ragtag band of college dropouts and social misfits into the bush to prepare for an impending apoca-

lypse. Alarmed by the deaths in Jonestown, the parents of Rock's disciples began demanding that the Quebec authorities take immediate action.

On December 11, four Quebec provincial police officers intercepted Rock and Jacques Giguère, dressed in their tunics, while they were driving to a Radio Canada interview in Quebec City. Lacking any evidence that Rock was either a danger to himself or to others, they had no legal grounds to take him into custody. But Rock had no wish to make trouble, so he agreed to accompany them to the Hôtel-Dieu de Levis hospital in suburban Quebec City for a battery of psychiatric tests. Interviewed by Dr. Raynald Côté, Rock denied being the commune's leader. The group, he said, lived according to democratic principles "in peace and without any promiscuity."

In a three-page report dated December 13, Côté described the patient as being coherent, "of normal intelligence" and "more than agreeable," but possibly suffering from schizophrenic hallucinations.

> **Mr. Thériault maintains few relations with his family, it appears, and he informed me that his father threw him out of the house when he was fifteen. He characterizes his father as a severe man who was also a bit of an alcoholic. . . . He explained that about two years ago, he had a vision in which he saw himself getting divorced, opening a clinic to help people stop smoking and, one day, going to live in the Gaspé. . . . He describes himself as the most passive man on earth and says that he is content to live according to the Bible. He says he is convinced that the end of the world will come in February. By this, he means the return of Christ and the voyage to another world. He**

says that he sincerely believes in his religion even though "deep down, I doubt a bit". . . .

Concerning his visions, he says that he is convinced that they come from God. . . . He asked if I thought that they may have another cause; for example, a problem with his nervous system. . . .

The evidence suggests that he is suffering from a mystical delusion which has persisted for the past two years. This delusion could be a sign of schizophrenia, but to be precise would require a longer observation. He never showed himself to be aggressive or menacing toward others, and I do not believe that hospitalization is necessary in his case. Furthermore, there is no allegation or legal measure that would justify treating him against his will. He is therefore free to leave the hospital.



It was the first of many times that Rock would bamboozle the authorities. For in spite of his pious disavowal of promiscuity and his portrayal of himself as a gentle shepherd, Rock was in the process of establishing his own personal harem at the Eternal Mountain. Shortly after sleeping with twenty-one-year-old Nicole, he decreed that all commune marriages other than his own were annulled. Then, one by one, Rock took each of the women to be his "wife," with the sole exception of Jacques' wife, Maryse Grenier. He even "married" Gabrielle Nadeau and carried her into his bed every now and then, although by all accounts he did not attempt to have sex with the invalid. "It began during that first fall in the Gaspé," Marise Lambert recalled. "It was one marriage ritual after the other, over a period of months. He planted the idea using the story of King

David and his wives. Some of us had no boyfriends or husbands, and we were out in the woods. So we weren't opposed to this. In the Bible, the harem was very beautiful and good."

Although Claude Ouellette silently acquiesced, inside he was shattered by Rock's arbitrary decree. It had been Rock who had originally talked him into marrying Solange, even though she wasn't his type. Since that time he had grown to love her—and she had become pregnant with Claude's child. Still, Rock kept telling Claude that he and Solange were a bad match. Couldn't he see that Solange didn't really like him? The marriage, Rock said, was just not working out.

Claude had to admit that his wife had never really shown any love toward him. According to other group members, Solange was initially uncomfortable with sex. "She didn't like it when Claude touched her," Gisèle said. "But that wasn't his fault. It was because of how she grew up—the way her father drank too much and hurt her mother. She didn't like men. Claude tried to be tender with her, but she had a lot of problems with sex."

Indeed, Solange was one of the last women that Rock managed to talk into sleeping with him. In a strange way, her rebellious nature heightened her appeal to him. "Rock liked Solange the most, and he put a lot of effort into winning her over," Marise Lambert said. For her part, Solange never displayed the kind of giggling, fawning adoration for Rock that Nicole and Chantal demonstrated. But she looked up to him the way a young girl regards a stern father with a mixture of fear and admiration. She had learned as a child that there were two kinds of men in life: the strong and the weak. Rock was undeniably one of the strong ones.

Gisèle felt helpless to complain about Rock's be-

havior. It pained her to think of him sleeping with the other women, but she had trained herself to obey her husband. "Your desire shall be for your husband," she had read in the *Book of Genesis*, "and he shall rule over you." Moreover, she was about to give birth to her first child, and in the late stages of her pregnancy found it uncomfortable to have sex. She felt guilty for wanting to deprive Rock of carnal pleasure.

As Rock pointed out to her many times, he was only following the example set by the Old Testament kings. Saul, David and Solomon had all created great families by taking many wives. It was important to have many children to prepare for the New Jerusalem.

All the same, Rock was careful not to flaunt his exploits in front of his legal wife. He usually made love in the afternoon, while the others were working outside, or at night when they were asleep. Once, Gisèle woke up at about 3 a.m. and heard moans and giggles coming from one of the other lofts. Rock was in bed with Chantal and Nicole, who were obviously enjoying themselves. Gisèle lay there confused, trying not to cry.

Before long, the other women were competing among themselves for Rock's attention and writing regular love letters to him. Gabrielle, who kept assuring herself that she was the most attractive and desirable of the women, was especially eager for his affection. The first time she accompanied Rock to his bed, he put her hand on his penis and asked her if its size suited his status as a prophet and leader. On his instructions, she began to perform fellatio. When she tried to kiss him, he brusquely pushed her head back down toward his groin. If she wanted to masturbate while giving him pleasure, he told Gabrielle, that was acceptable, but she was forbid-

den to touch his lips. Nor would he condescend to penetrate her unless he wanted to make her pregnant.

After that, Gabrielle tried everything to please her master, even if it meant humiliation. She told herself that if she kept accepting Rock's abuse without question, one day she would become deserving of his love.

Adored Papy and well-loved Master,

My heart is sliding next to your immense father's heart. You have brought a lot of peace to me. I am happy about the lovely family that you have formed and have allowed me to join. I thank you equally for the promise of better days. I feel very good being at your side, to be one of your children and to live simply but fully. It feels wonderful to realize we are all of one body that is not condemned to die. And before finishing I would like to tell you again what I told you when I had the impression of losing my breath the other night. I am slime. I am less than nothing. And I beg your pardon for all of the errors of my flesh.

I love you Papy and I will love you eternally,

Thirtsa

P.S. Excuse my handwriting



As Rock began to play out his sexual fantasies with the commune women, he abandoned what remained of his holistic lifestyle. The one-time proponent of vegetarianism and natural healing was suddenly consuming meat again and devouring Pepsi and potato chips as if they were going out of style. Many of the groceries were donated by sympathetic area residents, who made regular runs into

the compound that winter by snowmobile. Not all of the contributions were charitable. On at least one occasion, Rock ordered Gabrielle to have sex with a local shopkeeper in return for several bags of milk, meat and cheese. She complied reluctantly, hoping to please her master. The way Rock saw it, the food was "a gift from God." So were the welfare cheques that group members received—more than 1,400 dollars a month, which went straight into Rock's bank account in New Carlisle.

After two years on the wagon, Rock had also rediscovered his love of alcohol. At first it was just ceremonial wine, which he purchased by the case to use during prayers and while reciting from the Bible. Soon he graduated to beer and bottles of cognac. He could drink for hours without slurring his speech, but after downing half-a-dozen beers he would become boastful and belligerent.

Alcohol frequently evoked a kind of monstrous brutality in Rock. Often when he drank, he would keep his followers up all night. If anyone dared to fall asleep during one of his rambling sermons, he would grab a four-inch-thick wooden club and beat the offender in full view of his frightened assembly. When Jacques Giguère's wife, Maryse Grenier, ate two pancakes without Rock's permission in the fall of 1978—a period in which she was pregnant—he punched her and broke two of her ribs.

One of Rock's favorite targets was Maryse Grenier's baby boy, Samuel Giguère. As with every child who was not his own, Rock considered him an "animal" and ordered that he sleep apart from his parents in an unheated work room. When Samuel cried, Rock instructed Jacques Giguère, the infant's father, to strip him naked and roll him in the snow. The young child's feet turned purple and his penis swelled up from sleeping on the cold ground.

At various other times that winter, Rock punished group members for minor transgressions by forcing them to strip naked and stand outside for hours on end, ignoring their pleas for leniency. "We couldn't defend ourselves," Jacques Giguère said. "First of all, it would make the attack worse. And second, if we hit him back he made us feel that we were raising our hand against God. If we struck God, we might as well die and go to hell."

On the contrary, whenever Rock was displeased his followers wrote groveling letters to him.

> Hello Papy!
>
> I am writing about what you said on the subject of nutrition. It is very true that I nibble, a damnable fault which I will never again repeat. The thought of ingesting such a large quantity of food in so little time discourages me, even if I work outside the entire day without eating. I ask that you forgive me. If it is stealing, I did not realize it.
>
> It is this fault which causes my plumpness. I do not want to be a fat and plump servant. That is too ugly next to the man that you are.
>
> I don't know what to think about everything and the meaning of my actions. I only know that I will not repeat them. And I don't speak lightly.
>
> I wish to be a true servant to you, my Master. Alert, vigorous, with a clear and lively spirit and well-balanced to serve you every moment of my life.
>
> I have a long way to go.
>
> Thank you Papy,
> I love you,
> Hogla [Francine Laflamme]



Maryse Grenier, the only one of the nine women who had not become Rock's concubine, was less poetic in her pleas for mercy.

Papy:

I must request your forgiveness for the squawling noise my children made while you were taking your bath. Please forgive me for having disturbed your bath.

I love you,
Rebecca



At dinner once, Rock, unable to finish his meal because of his chronic stomach problems, made Jacques a rare offer of a second helping. The malnourished disciple accepted gratefully, only to discover later that his master was furious at him.

Hello my friend,

I am writing to you this morning, first, to ask your pardon for the hurt that I caused you by eating from another plate that you gave me. Secondly, I hope that you will take pity on your little group of people. I ask that you not hit with justice because we would all die. Please excuse me for having dared to write to you to ask for these things.

Nathan



Once, when Maryse Grenier began to talk about leaving the commune, Rock instructed Jacques to discipline her by cutting off one of her toes with an ax. Jacques shuddered at the thought of harming his

wife, but Rock kept goading him. "What are you, a faggot?" he yelled. "Don't you have any balls? If you want to be a man, you have to learn how to teach your woman a lesson." Jacques broke into tears. Rock then grabbed the ax and threatened to cut off *all* of Maryse's toes. Reluctantly, Jacques took the ax back. Aiming carefully so that he would not do more damage than was necessary, he swung and severed one of his wife's small toes.

After that, Rock began to use Jacques as his principal enforcer. Having mutilated his wife, it became easier to punish the others. Jacques kept telling himself that if he didn't hurt the others in the way Rock ordered him, the commune leader would do something much worse.



February 17, 1979, was an eventful day. Without warning, two hundred thousand Chinese troops invaded Vietnam. Police in New York arrested an ex-convict with mafia ties for stealing 5.8 million dollars' worth of airline cargo. Quebec Premier René Lévesque announced that his province would boycott future constitutional talks. But contrary to Rock's prediction, there was no shower of boulder-sized hailstones, no Second Coming, no voyage to another world.

A less dedicated group of believers might have questioned the wisdom of their exalted leader, but Rock's group gave him the benefit of the doubt. Besides, Moses had a logical explanation. Nailing down the precise time of such events was a hazardous business, he told them, because "in the eyes of God one second could be forty of our years, just as forty of His years may be one second to us."

That was good enough for Jacques Giguère. "There was a mix-up in the date," he told a journal-

ist at the time. "But the end of the world is imminent. If God told Moses it would be so, then it will happen. God talks through our shepherd, and we chose not to join the conventional religious groups because we are the only ones who believe, who know the end of the world is near."

In any event, Rock had more than an apocalypse on his mind in early 1979. Quebec's lands and forests department was moving to evict the group from its settlement, which turned out to have been built on Crown land. In early March, he and Jacques Giguère—whose wife had given birth to Samuel two months earlier—headed to Quebec City in a vain attempt to meet with Lévesque. Parading through the august corridors of the National Assembly in his brown robe and work boots, Rock had a brief encounter with an aide to the premier, who assured them that they would be allowed to remain on the land.

But the reprieve from outside interference was shortlived. Chantal Labrie's parents, Rosaire and Victoria, had spent months reassuring themselves that their daughter would see through Thériault when the world did not end as he had predicted on February 17. When the day passed without any word from Chantal, they hired a lawyer to obtain a court order forcing her to undergo another round of psychiatric tests.

On March 17, 1979, two Quebec provincial police officers showed up at the door of Rock's cabin bearing the Labries' court order. They left empty-handed. Rock, who had refused them entry, boasted that the police would have to "walk over my body" to take his Ruth away from him. "Let them come with an army if they want," he said. "Me, I have God and his army of angels."

For a while, Rock seemed to be winning the pub-

lic-relations war with the Quebec authorities. Even the sudden departure from the commune of one of its founding members, twenty-five-year-old Jacques Fiset, did not damage his image. In hindsight, it seems likely that Fiset found Rock's violence too much to take, and decided to bail out while he could; in any event, Rock told the others that Fiset had been taken by the devil. But on April 14, Quebec City's respected *Le Soleil* newspaper trumpeted an interview with the young man under the headline: They Are Happy And Free To Leave If They Wish. The article quoted Fiset as praising Rock's leadership qualities, saying he'd left the compound not because he was dissatisfied with the conditions but because he was curious to rediscover the outside world. "Before Moses decides something, he speaks to us and we decide," Fiset said when asked about commune life. "But it is necessary to have rules, necessary to have a shepherd, without whom the lambs would jump the fence."

The reporter, Elyette Curvalle, then added her own observation:

> **When one looks at the pictures taken by our photographer during a visit lately to Lac Sec, one sees happy faces, women nursing their children [and] scenes of daily life working in the fields. And among them, their spiritual father Rock, the leader of whom Jacques speaks with affection.**



The police, however, were singularly unimpressed by the *Le Soleil* article. Four days after its publication, ten officers swooped down on the settlement in a pre-dawn helicopter raid and arrested the commune leader for obstructing justice. A sessions

court judge in nearby New Carlisle promptly ordered him to undergo a thirty-day psychiatric examination at Robert Giffard Hospital in Quebec City. Meanwhile, police flew Chantal to a separate Quebec City psychiatric facility.

With Rock temporarily out of the picture, the police began flying parents and other relatives into the settlement by helicopter. They hoped that the intervention would somehow break Rock's hold over his followers. But it was a hopeless cause. The remaining members were like lost sheep, anxiously waiting for their shepherd's return. When Raoul and Laurette Boilard arrived, Solange wanted nothing to do with them. She even refused to show her parents her first child—a boy born three months earlier from her union with Claude. Denied access to his grandson, Raoul Boilard became enraged—and the encounter deteriorated into a shouting match.

Francine Laflamme's mother had an equally disheartening experience. Along with the other parents, she was stopped at the gate to the compound by "Mamy," who seemed to be trying to keep everyone's spirits up during Rock's absence. As Francine's mother said:

> *It was like we were trespassing on private property. Gisèle insisted that we wait in a little cabin and only enter the main lodge two at a time. She said we could enter only if we removed all of our so-called "material possessions," like jewelry, watches and chains. It was absolutely ridiculous but we went along with her wishes anyhow. When it was our turn to go inside, they were all sitting around a large table not saying too much. With Thériault arrested, it was as if they had lost their father. I spotted Francine stirring a large caul-*

dron. She was pale and very, very thin. She barely looked at us. I think she was having a nervous breakdown. I tried to reach out to her, but there was no response. And the whole time, Gabrielle Lavallée was sitting there giving Francine a glare as if to tell her to keep in line and not to talk to us.



The Laflammes left the cabin after five minutes. They were shattered. As with some other parents, it would be the last time they would see their children for several years.

The psychiatrists' verdicts only added to the parents' agony. Chantal Labrie walked free from Quebec City's Roy Rousseau clinic on April 27 and headed straight back to the Eternal Mountain like a homing pigeon. After nine days of tests, the doctors had judged her to be in "perfect mental health." Her parents were stunned. "Chantal is under the domination of Moses," Victoria Labrie insisted. "I don't doubt their beliefs, but I'm worried about the whole structure of their lifestyle."

That same day, Rock called a news conference in the boardroom of Robert Giffard Hospital. Obviously enjoying his celebrity status, he poured scorn on a Quebec tabloid newspaper that had compared him to Jim Jones. The television cameras caught him showing off a handful of fan letters, many accompanied by cheques or money orders, wishing him success. "People often ask me who and what my disciples were before they joined me," he said. "They were young people, alienated from their families, who used drugs, drank alcohol and smoked. They came to me and I detoxified them and offered them moral support. But it wasn't easy for them. Sometimes they were so frustrated they even went

so far as to hit me. When they couldn't take it any more, I told them to hit me rather than the walls. They did but soon they'd cry and say, 'Help me, help me.' They took me for their father, as their supporter."

It was a performance worthy of an Academy Award. When Rock finished, the hospital's director, Dr. Louis Roy, chided the public for automatically assuming that the bearded thirty-one-year-old messiah was crazy simply "because he was sent here for tests." He referred to the patient as Moses.

The media lapped it up. Suddenly Rock was a certifiable folk hero. In quick succession, he was released from the psychiatric hospital ahead of schedule, judged fit to stand trial on his charge of obstructing justice and given a one-year suspended sentence. Meanwhile, the *Montreal Star* was fretting that Rock—the paper described him as a soft-spoken mountain man—would never recover "the serenity he had found prior to his arrest." The *Gazette* published a stirring editorial in defence of Rock's religious beliefs, declaring confidently that he had "threatened no one and broken no law" and saying:

> **In a sense we are all brainwashed; that is to say, we all harbor and are programed to defend unshakable illogical beliefs. It is a dangerous business to assume one set of beliefs superior to another merely because it is more widely held.**

CHAPTER 10

BABY SAMUEL



It wasn't long before Rock became yesterday's news. For several weeks, Quebec's newspapers and television networks had had a field day with stories of the peaceloving oddball who was living like Davy Crockett in the backwoods of Eastern Quebec. But within days of his release from the psychiatric hospital on April 30, 1979, he was reduced to a half-forgotten curiosity.

Back at the Eternal Mountain, however, the flurry of events had two important consequences. The way Rock's followers saw it, a battery of high-priced psychiatrists had carefully explored their leader's brain and issued him a clean bill of health. Didn't that *prove* that he was who he said he was—an emissary from God? And now he was back among them, having vanquished the unbelievers.

The other immediate effect of the blaze of publicity was on Rock's own mind. His brief twirl in the spotlight seemed only to inflate his already overblown sense of self-importance. As soon as the snow melted, he ordered Claude, Jacques Giguère and the others to go to work transforming his humble, one-room cabin into a clapboard castle. It took them months, but they added a second storey and

several new wings, a sauna and two more fireplaces. While his followers toiled, Rock would grab his hand-carved staff and ascend the hillside to survey his "kingdom." In due course, he ordered up new projects: a smokehouse for the fish they caught in the nearby rivers, two greenhouses and a stable. His pride and joy was a storage room where he produced kegs of high-powered beer.

Police intervened at the Eternal Mountain only once more that year, in an event that was to have a permanent impact on Rock's behavior. In early October 1979, Gabrielle Nadeau, whose parents had been horrified by Rock's decision to take her to the Gaspé, slipped into a coma and died. Rock was all set to bury the corpse at the foot of the mountain when the police found out about the death. Over his objections, they flew the body to Quebec City for an autopsy. An investigation turned up no evidence that he was responsible for the death.

When Rock learned that Nadeau's body had been buried in the village where she'd been born, he threw a fit. He called it a sacrilege. He swore that the next time someone died at the commune he would do everything in his power to keep the body out of the hands of the authorities.

A few months later, in January 1980, he called up his ex-wife, Francine Grenier, and began bragging about his wealth and possessions. He told Francine to meet him at a motel in suburban Quebec City because he had gifts for Rock Jr. and François. When they arrived, she found Rock and Nicole sitting in one of the motel rooms, surrounded by half-empty bottles of beer and liquor. Rock immediately insisted on taking everyone to a fancy restaurant. He made a point of ordering the most expensive dishes on the menu, and as the meal progressed he kept flashing a thick wad of twenty- and fifty-dollar bills

—Francine was sure it contained thousands of dollars. At one point, he even began throwing cash around the table.

Francine Grenier made several subsequent visits to the commune. Rock usually threw a party, with plenty of alcohol, to mark the occasion. Showing off once, he hauled out a box of twelve-inch nails, flexed his biceps and proceeded to bend the spikes into the shape of a V. Chantal, Nicole and the others applauded their leader's strength, but Rock's ex-wife thought the whole scene so bizarre that she began to laugh. She soon regretted her indiscretion. Rock pounced on her, dragged her from her seat and unleashed a volley of punches and kicks. She screamed and cried for help, but Rock's followers just stood by and watched blankly. For Rock, that kind of outburst had become almost routine.



On a snowy night in early November 1980, the commune welcomed its first new member since Rock had led his followers into the bush more than two years earlier. Guy Veer was a mental patient. Twice that year, the twenty-three-year-old had been treated for depression at Quebec City's Robert Giffard Hospital, the same institution that had judged Rock mentally fit six months earlier. During Veer's second stay, he had wandered off without his doctor's approval. A lanky, dark-haired man with bushy sideburns, a twisted mouth and a vacant stare, he had apparently heard about Moses on television and decided to join the commune in order to escape society. He was "at the end of his rope," he explained, and wanted to find a quieter, simpler life. (Rock's own version was slightly different. He claimed that one of the hospital's psychiatrists had been so impressed by Rock's experiment in alternative living

that he actually encouraged Veer to go live at the Eternal Mountain.)

Rock immediately gave Veer a new name, Kedemoth, and assigned Gabrielle to give him "a complete physical and mental examination." He passed and was put to work chopping wood and storing provisions for the winter. Rock told the new arrival that he would be permitted to stay at the commune provided that he slept and ate in a storage shed.

Early in 1981, Rock presented Veer with a handwritten contract. He would be allowed to move into a small room attached to the main house as long as he agreed to act as full-time babysitter to three of the commune children: Samuel and Miriam Giguère, two and four respectively, and two-year-old Simon Ouellette, son of Solange and Claude. Rock himself had fathered three children since establishing the commune—one by Gisèle, another by Solange and a third by Nicole—but they were to be kept well away from the mentally deficient Veer. Moses refused to allow any of the mothers to cuddle or comfort their children, explaining that parental love interfered with devotion to God and his humble servant, Moses. Still, he gave his own offspring special privileges, including the right to live and eat in the main building. That way, they would learn to revere Moses rather than their mothers.

Under the terms of the contract, Veer's compensation for looking after the three children was a small woodstove to keep himself warm, a case of twenty-four home-brewed beer, two hens, a rooster and one meal a day. He signed on the dotted line. "I worked with the others during the day, chopping wood, cleaning up and doing construction," Veer later said. "The three children lived with me twenty-four hours a day. I had to make their food,

wash their clothes and change their diapers. I worked hard all day and then I'd have to get up during the night to look after the kids. I could never get any rest."

On the evening of March 23, Rock organized a party to celebrate the arrival of his two older boys, Rock Jr., now twelve, and François, ten. They adored their father and had begged their mother to let them live at the commune. Veer, as befitted his lowly status in the group, was not invited to the celebrations. He spent the night in his room while the others drank, danced and laughed.

The truth about what happened next will probably never be known.

The "official" version—the account that Rock and most of the other commune members, including Veer, eventually told the police—is that Veer was having trouble sleeping because of Samuel's crying. Suddenly he snapped. He screamed at the boy to be quiet. When that didn't work, he grabbed Samuel by the throat and punched him in the face five or six times with his fist. The next morning Rock discovered what had happened and ordered Gabrielle, the commune nurse, to look after the child. She fed him water, honey and fruit juice with an eyedropper, but Samuel was crying and shivering and unable to sit in a chair. His head kept flopping to one side. Later, Gabrielle said she noticed that Samuel had a swelling on his penis. Rock sterilized a pair of scissors in a jar of ninety-four per cent alcohol and lanced the swelling, allowing urine to drain out. Gabrielle then applied a homemade salve of iodine, olive oil and plaintain to the wound.

That, at any rate, is the story the police and the courts accepted. But in hindsight it seems likely they were misled, and that Rock orchestrated a cover-up of his reckless cruelty toward Samuel. Ac-

cording to Gisèle, Samuel's face was bruised on the morning after the party but he was otherwise in normal condition. His neck seemed fine and he had no trouble sitting by himself on his pot. Rock did indeed "operate" on the boy that night, but it was not because of any swelling on his penis. Instead, Rock announced that he was going to circumcise the two-year-old boy with a razor blade. Finally, the alcohol wasn't used only to sterilize the instrument. According to Gisèle, Rock poured several ounces of almost pure ethanol into a rubber bulb, inserted the nozzle into Samuel's mouth and gave him several squirts as an anaesthetic—enough, perhaps, to cause alcohol poisoning.

Whatever the reason, Samuel was found dead the next morning.

The infant's mother, Maryse Grenier, was off in the forest collecting firewood on Rock's orders when she heard the grim news. She was in such a semi-conscious stupor that she could scarcely think. "I didn't go to see Samuel and I continued to work," she told investigators later. "At dinner-time Moses suggested burning Samuel's remains, because if we buried him the crows or the bears could dig him up and eat him afterwards. So Nathan [Jacques Giguère] and I agreed that Samuel be incinerated."

Claude took the tiny corpse, wrapped it up in a sheet and slung it over his shoulder like a sack of potatoes. He recalled:

> *I was in such shock, tired and mentally drained, that I didn't even want to think about what I was doing. I just did it—carried the body into the woods just like that to burn it. I guess I also did it to spare Jacques the*

agony he was experiencing over Samuel's death. It was all so insane.



Life at the Eternal Mountain returned to normal after that. Rock drove his subjects like slaves, starving them and beating them for every minor trespass. His disciples fawned over him, trying to outdo each other with their declarations of love and devotion.

On Rock's birthday, May 16, Marise Lambert gave him a letter. Scattered across its two pages were seven small hand-drawn hearts.

Dear Papy!

On this day of your birthday I am coming to tell you with simple words about all of the happiness I feel in belonging to you. I thank the Eternal for giving you the breath of life. For thirty-four years he has animated the life in you, a life full of love which reflects the divinity of your Master. He has put your foot down on a solid rock and has made your steps very firm. You never make mistakes. To know that I am part of your troupe fills me with joy.

Knowing that your voyage here on Earth is meant to teach us and bring us to green pastures, it is comforting to feel your presence. If you were not there, where would I be? I am growing serene next to you, you who loves me with true love, a father who teaches, corrects and covers me with bounty.

You know how to make me laugh with your jokes and silliness. You know how to make me cry with your franticness, which only the heart can feel. I laugh because I love you and I cry because I love you.

All my joy is to be forever close to you and

to ensure that your people—us, all of your children—can give you what you desire.

Lovingly!
Sara



But the more Marise and the others gave to Rock, the more he wanted. His appetite for power grew ever larger as his subjects became weaker.

During one of his drinking binges later that year, on September 14, he became angry at Veer for some minor transgression and decided he should stand trial for Samuel's death. The commune leader gathered his flock in the main room of the complex and assigned each of them a role: Jacques was to be the judge, Gisèle the prosecutor, Claude the lawyer for the defence and Gabrielle the coroner. The jury members were Solange, Francine, Chantal, Nicole, Josée and Marise Lambert. After more than an hour of testimony and debate, Rock handed out scraps of paper to the jury and called for a vote. The result was unanimous: not guilty by reason of insanity. Solange went further, scrawling on her ballot that Veer did not belong in the commune in the first place: "This man should be taken to a psychiatric institution. He is crazy."

That appeared to be the end of the matter. Two or three hours later, however, Rock took Jacques aside and suggested castrating Veer in spite of the verdict. Jacques objected, but Rock was insistent. He decided to take another vote.

This time, ten people cast ballots, including Rock Jr. Only three of them—Jacques, his wife, Maryse, and Gisèle—opposed the measure. The rest were strongly in favor of the motion.

Veer, who had watched the proceedings in silence, suddenly objected. But Rock sat him down

and talked him into it. He reminded Veer that he'd been complaining recently of headaches and explained that the pain in his head was a direct result of a problem with his left testicle. Besides, he argued, the young man had "respiratory problems" caused by excessive masturbation; there was no better cure for that, Rock pointed out, than castration.

A stickler for detail, Rock instructed Veer to write out a letter of consent. "I said no because I was scared," it read, "and now I say yes because, anyway, [the testicles] are not doing me any good."

Moses now prepared for surgery. He ordered Veer to lie on the kitchen table and instructed Gabrielle to fetch the instruments: an elastic band, a razor blade, a magnifying glass and eyebrow tweezers. As the others watched, Claude and Jacques held the patient's legs while Chantal focussed the beam of a penlight on his scrotum.

Months later, two hardened Quebec police investigators winced and shifted uncomfortably in their seats as Veer recounted the operation.

> *They asked me questions about what happened with Samuel the night I hit him. Afterwards Moses explained to me that my headaches could be caused by the pain in my left testicle, and he offered to take out my testicles because I had hit the child and because of what had followed the hitting. He explained to me the hierarchy that existed in the group. In relation to this hierarchy I was a slave, and following the removal of the testicles I would become a sterile eunuch. I accepted and I signed a consent form. Moses told me that if I did not want to sign, he would not make me. He made me take alcohol, about two or three glasses, and he in-*

stalled an elastic band around my genitals. I lay down on a table in the house of Moses. Everyone in the group was there, but I don't remember about the kids. Moses performed the operation, assisted by the nurse, Thirtsa [Gabrielle], and I did not feel any pain. After the operation, the nurse Thirtsa took care of me until I was well again. Since that operation, I do not have any more headaches, but on the other hand I do not get hard-ons any more, either. I also don't have any more sexual desires.



Veer's scrotum turned purple after the operation and bled for a week. Gabrielle, assigned to look after the commune eunuch, applied saltwater compresses for twenty minutes each day and fed the young man a diet of iron-rich food. "Veer never spoke of his headaches again," she remarked later when questioned by the police.

In fact, headaches were the least of his problems. Rock was increasingly fearful that word of Samuel's death and the castration would leak out of the commune, and he apparently saw Veer as a security risk. He told Veer that if anyone started asking questions Veer should reply that the two-year-old had succumbed after being kicked in the head by a horse. He was not to breathe a word about the castration. And whenever Rock was drunk, he would torture Veer to drive the message home. At one point he strapped Veer to a tree branch and whipped him with a leather belt until his back was black and blue. Later he tied the terrified eunuch to a post, stripped him naked and instructed his followers to take up knives in a bizarre test of loyalty. Rock ordered them to march up to Veer and stab him re-

peatedly in the chest until he bled to death. Only at the last moment did Moses, laughing maniacally, call the assailants off.

On November 5, Veer managed to slip away and trudge the twenty-two kilometers through the bush to Saint-Jogues, where he told a villager that Jacques Giguère's baby had died after being kicked by a horse. After a month-long investigation, fifteen police officers stormed the compound in jeeps and on snowmobiles, taking Rock, Jacques and Maryse Grenier into custody on a coroner's warrant in connection with Samuel's death. A day after the raid, they found the toddler's charred bones buried in a shallow grave three hundred meters from the main lodge, after being directed to the spot by the remaining members of the group. The seven surviving children—Rock Jr. and François, Miriam Giguère, Simon Ouellette and the three kids that Rock had fathered in the commune—were seized by youth protection authorities and placed in foster homes in the New Carlisle area.

For all of Rock's efforts to cover up the two crimes, the investigation proved to be a relatively simple affair. Veer, who had been picked up by police in the Quebec City area, acknowledged striking Samuel several times. Gabrielle did her best to convince the police that the boy had died as a result of the beating, not because of Rock's sadistic attempts at "treating" him. Gisèle's statement seemed to contradict that, suggesting that Samuel's injuries after the beating were not as serious as Rock and some of the others had made out. But even Gisèle was too confused or afraid to mention that Rock had injected raw alcohol into the child's mouth.

In the case of Veer's injuries, of course, the physical evidence was pretty hard to ignore. The police even found the ballots that had been used during

the "trial" and Veer's handwritten letter of consent to the operation. Rock, to no one's surprise, claimed that he had emasculated Veer for medical reasons. But most of the other members acknowledged that the castration was Veer's punishment for beating Samuel.

The police assigned to the case had seen a lot of strange things in the bush, but nothing that came close to this. Even the way the witnesses talked about the unsavory events was eerie. They were so detached and unemotional it was as though they were describing a trip to the laundromat. Nobody cried, nobody even looked embarrassed.

Equally disturbing was the revelation that a twelve-year-old boy had participated in the vote to castrate Veer and had been forced to watch during the operation. On December 10, 1981, two Quebec police officers accompanied Rock Thériault Jr. to the police station in New Carlisle and questioned him as a material witness.

Q: Did you participate in the vote to castrate Guy Veer?
A: Yes.
Q: Do you know the significance of castration?
A: Yes. It's to cut off the balls.
Q: What was the reason for the castration?
A: The main reason was the death of Samuel, which was caused by Guy Veer.
Q: How did you vote?
A: I voted Yes.
Q: Why?
A: Because one of his balls was sick, he was having trouble breathing and also because of the death of Samuel.
Q: Did you assist in the operation?

A: Yes, in the operation on one ball—the second one.
Q: Who did the operation?
A: It was Moses, assisted by the nurse, Thirtsa [Gabrielle].
Q: With what?
A: With a razor blade.
Q: Did anyone else help?
A: I remember that Rachel [Solange] held the head. I don't remember about the others.
Q: Did you see where the testicles were put?
A: Yes. They were in a Kleenex.

CHAPTER 11

IN THE WORLD OF THE DEAD



After seven hours of testimony in a packed New Carlisle courtroom on Friday, December 18, Coroner Gilles Gaul found Rock Thériault, Jacques Giguère, Maryse Grenier, Gabrielle Lavallée and Guy Veer criminally responsible for the death of two-year-old Samuel Giguère.

Based on that finding, the police filed a total of seventeen separate criminal charges against seven people. Rock, Jacques, Maryse, Gabrielle and Guy Veer were each accused of criminal negligence causing bodily harm in connection with Samuel's death. Claude was charged with obstructing justice by burning the toddler's corpse. Jacques and Maryse were also charged with neglecting their five-year-old daughter, Miriam; the same accusation was made against Claude and Solange for their treatment of three-year-old Simon. Rock and Gabrielle were also charged with having caused "bodily harm to Guy Veer, with the intention of mutilating him by castrating him with a razor blade." After a bail hearing, during which all seven pleaded not guilty, Sessions Court Judge Roch Roy released Veer and

four of the commune members on their own recognizance on the condition that they not return to the camp. Rock and Jacques were denied bail on the grounds that they represented a danger to society.

As the case dragged on through the first half of 1982, the residents of New Carlisle became increasingly uneasy about the newcomers in their midst. On Rock's instructions, Gisèle signed a 150-dollar-a-month lease for a huge, turn-of-the-century, two-storey house, with three bedrooms on the ground floor and six more upstairs, that had been abandoned for two years and was in dire need of a coat of paint. The local newspaper reported that Gisèle and the other nine commune members who had moved into the rundown old building had surprised nearby residents by asking for buckets of hot water to wipe away dust and cobwebs. Bert Manning, who lived across the road, "was very definitely opposed to the idea of his new neighbors," the paper noted. "The prospect of crowds of curiosity-seekers parking in front of his own home held little appeal for him." Another local, Rhoda Smollett, called on the police to disband the group and ship Rock's disciples back to the towns where they'd grown up. But New Carlisle Mayor Barry Tennier responded that the town had no legal cause to evict the new arrivals. "People are free to live where they wish," he said. "If they break the law, the police are there to handle it."

In spite of that hands-off attitude, the social workers at the local child-protection office were trying their best to sever Rock's hold over his followers. After consulting psychologists, they agreed to return the children to their mothers on one condition: they had to move out of Gisèle's house and, with the welfare cheques they were receiving each month, rent their own apartments. The theory was

that forcing them to live separately would help to dissolve the bonds among them and break their dependency on Rock. Chantal and Maryse reluctantly found their own places to live, while Solange moved into a basement apartment a couple of miles out of town with Claude, to maintain the facade of their marriage. Three-and-a-half months after the raid, Rock's followers got their children back under a supervision order that allowed social workers to pay regular visits to their homes. Meanwhile, Rock's son François had gone back to Thetford Mines to live with his mother. François' brother Rock Jr. turned down a similar offer and chose to stay with foster parents in Bonaventure, fifteen kilometers west of New Carlisle. Gisèle remained in the house with her three-year-old son, Jeremiah.

On September 29, 1982, the defendants were found guilty on all counts. Jacques and Claude were sentenced to six months in jail and three years' probation for child abandonment; Maryse and Solange each drew three years' probation. Gabrielle received a nine-month jail term and three years' probation for criminal negligence in Samuel's death and causing bodily harm with intent for her role in Veer's castration. Rock, as the ringleader, received the longest sentence: two years less a day plus three years' probation on each of two charges, to be served concurrently. A week later, the judge acquitted Veer on grounds of mental incompetence and sent him back to Quebec City's Robert Giffard Hospital.

With Rock behind bars, the police torched the commune buildings and bulldozed the ashes into the ground.

Unfortunately for the authorities, Rock proved to have every bit as much influence over his followers when he was in jail as he had when free. Between

February and July of 1982, while in custody in New Carlisle awaiting trial, Rock had even managed to get three of his "wives"—Chantal, Gabrielle and Marise Lambert—pregnant while out of jail on weekend passes. He would phone Gisèle from prison twice a week, reminding her that it was her job to shield them from the evil forces swirling about in the outside world. If she failed to keep the flock together, there was no telling what would happen.

When they took Rock to prison, I felt a kind of liberation. But in a strange way I still felt attached to Rock. And he always said to me, "Mamy, you're a good wife. It's your job to look after everybody." Deep down I knew he was using me, but I blocked it out because I didn't want to understand. I worked all the time for him because I was scared of God. I helped Rock keep the people together, and now I'm sorry for that. But I wanted to keep the group together for the religion.

I remember one time I got fed up because it was so much work. I told him, "If you want to keep your fucking group together, get out of jail and do it yourself." I didn't go to visit him for three weeks and I didn't answer the phone. Geez, he was mad. And then all the girls came to me and said, "Come on, Mamy, Rock needs you."

Although Gisèle often complained about her responsibilities, in the end she always obeyed Rock's commands, determined to be a model wife. And whenever anyone else began to show signs of weak-

ening faith, she let Rock know about it. Rock would tell Gisèle to see that the person in question was at her house at a specified time the next day, when he would phone again. Sometimes he'd bend the unfortunate disciple's ear for an hour. By the time the call was over, he or she would be firmly back in the fold.

Even without his constant presence, Rock's followers remained faithful. They had no real friendships outside of the group and no desire to make any. They saw themselves as an island of purity in a hostile world populated by demons, sinners and corrupt influences. The evil beings included the judges and police who had put their master in jail. As the seeds of God's new world order as foretold in the Bible, they had to insulate themselves from the surrounding sea of unbelievers, who would be damned by the heavenly hosts. Gisèle could see the dangers herself when she went to see Rock in prison. To her annoyance, one of the senior guards, a handsome married man, repeatedly demanded sexual favors from her in return for extra visiting privileges. She refused to succumb to temptation.

Since Gabrielle was also in prison, the only source of dissension was Solange, who was growing increasingly jealous of Gisèle's status as Rock's principal wife and the group's surrogate leader. At times Solange lost her temper and threatened to leave.

Finally, Gisèle went to her and offered to make peace. "You shouldn't be jealous of me, Rachel," she said. "I don't even want to run the group. Why don't you take over?" Privately, she was looking forward to reducing her responsibilities and spending more time with her son.

On his next weekend visit, Rock confirmed Solange's new role. She sent him a letter later to express her gratitude.

Hello dear Papy: I come to thank you for giving the light to your people, who were at one time so distant. Thank you for all your Love that you never stop giving us. I wish you a marvelous week with your Eternal God, and I wish with all my heart that I can lighten your load with my position of Governor.

I love you very much, keeper of my heart, my life. May the Eternal bless you abundantly.

Rachel (kisses, kisses, kisses)

P.S. The other night when you came to see me it was very, very beautiful in my heart because I saw that you were truly My Master, My King. You are the most Handsome, the Greatest, the Best-Loved of the Kings of my heart. Henceforth I wish always to fulfill the words "I Love You."



After his sentencing, the authorities transferred Rock to Orsainville Detention Centre, a provincial jail on the northern edge of Quebec City. If anything, the phone contacts grew even more frequent. Rock wanted to ensure that he spoke with every one of his followers in turn. The monthly long-distance bill for his collect calls usually ranged between five hundred and six hundred dollars—money that came from the group's welfare cheques.

Occasionally, relatives attempted to rescue members of Rock's sect, but to no avail. In spite of her senior position within the group, Solange continued to waver between moods of childish dependence and rebellion. On St. Valentine's Day 1982, she even placed a collect call to her older brother Martin in Plessisville to tell him that she wanted to come home. It was the signal her family had been waiting for. Elated, Martin and Gisèle Martineau immedi-

ately jumped into a car and made the nine-hour trip to the Gaspé peninsula. They arrived at 9 p.m. only to discover that Solange had mysteriously changed her mind—she refused to go anywhere. "Her eyes were red and swollen," Gisèle Martineau said. "We knew she'd been crying for a long time."

For the next three hours, Solange's brother and sister begged and pleaded with her to leave New Carlisle. But Solange would have none of it. While other commune members looked on intently, Solange explained she was under police surveillance and was convinced the authorities would never allow her to move away from the area because she might one day have to testify in court. Gisèle Martineau was sure that Rock had planted the story in Solange's mind to discourage her from straying. But nothing Gisèle could say or do would change Solange's mind. The two visitors gave up and drove back to Plessisville in despair.

Another call came two days before Christmas that year. Again, Solange wanted to come home. Gisèle Martineau was overjoyed, but as a precaution, she decided not to risk the nine-hour drive. "I was sure one of the members would call Thériault in jail and then he would get to her, either with promises or threats." Instead, Gisèle rushed over to the bus station and paid the one-way fare from New Carlisle to Plessisville. The clerk then Telexed the bus station in New Carlisle with instructions to issue Solange a ticket. As soon as the Telex went through, Gisèle called her sister to let her know that all she had to do was go down to the terminal and catch the next westbound bus. But it was too late. Solange had once again changed her mind.

One by one, Claude, Jacques and Gabrielle got out of prison and moved into the house Gisèle had rented. When the last one arrived, the entire group moved to Quebec City to be closer to Rock, spreading themselves among four rented apartments in the same low-rise building in the suburb of Charlesbourg, near Orsainville.

One day, Gisèle went to Rock and asked for permission to visit her father, whom she had not seen in almost six years. Gisèle's sister, who still lived in Quebec City, had just told her he'd suffered a heart attack from the stress and sorrow caused by Gisèle's prolonged absence. Worried that her father might die in the hospital without meeting his grandson, Gisèle was determined to take Jeremiah, now four, to see him.

Rock was outraged. It was as though Gisèle's request was an act of betrayal. Hadn't she left her father's home years ago? God had granted her a new family, and it was her responsibility to care for it. How could she consider running off at the drop of a hat to see outsiders—people who were, after all, non-believers?

But Gisèle couldn't bring herself to forsake her father. She told Rock that if he refused to go along with the trip, she would leave and never come back.

The next morning, Rock phoned Gisèle's apartment and summoned her to the prison. When they met in the visitor's wing, he whispered that he'd consulted God about her request. In a monumental act of generosity, and with the Lord's blessing, he had decided to give her leave to visit her father.

With Jeremiah in tow, Gisèle took the train to see her father. At the hospital, she followed a nurse's directions to the room where he was recovering, but when she got there she didn't notice him among the other patients. She walked up to the first man she

saw and asked if he knew where she could find Mr. Tremblay. "It was my father, and I didn't even know it. He looked at me and laughed. 'Hell, you don't even recognize me?' And I started to cry because it was such a shock. When I left the house he was skinny, but now he was so big and looked so much older." Gisèle's father kept staring at Jeremiah, and asked why he was so quiet. He mentioned that he'd seen stories about Rock in the papers, and that if Gisèle was in trouble she could come home. She told him not to worry.



When he wasn't peppering his followers with phone calls and carefully composed letters, Rock was hunched over a microphone, pouring his accumulated wisdom into a tape recorder. A minor Quebec publisher had agreed to release Rock's autobiography. He filled box after box of cassette tapes with rambling, often incoherent discourses about his childhood, his religious inspirations and his years in the bush. A ghostwriter then took the 367 pages of transcript and managed to cobble together a 173-page book. Five thousand copies were printed in November 1983.

Pompously titled *L'Affaire Moïse* (The Moses Affair), the book contained few surprises and many outright distortions. It portrayed the thirty-six-year-old author as a gentle lover of nature and devoted student of holistic medicine who had offended the authorities with his determination to turn his back on modern society. The young boy from Thetford Mines who had proven so adept at shifting blame to others had grown into a master of deception and manipulation. Now, with his book, he was engaged in an Orwellian attempt to rewrite history. He failed to acknowledge the murky circumstances

surrounding the deaths of Geraldine Auclair and Gabrielle Nadeau, and he covered up his role in the killing of two-year-old Samuel Giguère. As for Guy Veer, he claimed that the ex-psychiatric patient "had for months been speaking about his desire to become a eunuch for the Holy Virgin."

With the roll of a printing press, the tyrant who had starved, beaten and brainwashed his subjects emerged as a philosopher whose benevolence and generosity had earned him the adulation of his peers. For example:

> **On returning from my daily three-kilometer walk one Saturday in June of 1980, I saw Nathan and Boaz coming towards me. They greeted me and hoisted me on to their shoulders amid cries of, "Long live the King!" Suddenly the others appeared and picked up the chant. The sheer beauty of the moment surprised and touched me. My friends begged me to enter the house and to sit on a richly decorated sofa while Debora recited a tribute. This little speech revealed what I represented to them: a model, a guide, a hero. In other words, I had become the sovereign of their hearts. As confirmation, my wife Esther placed on my head, while flutes played in the background, a metal crown covered with a piece of colored fabric on which were glued buttons in the place of precious stones. Next, they placed a robe around my shoulders and a rod in my hands like a sceptre. My friends informed me that from that day forward they would celebrate an annual Festival of the King in my honor.**

Lest anyone get the wrong impression, Rock hastened to point out that he had never seriously thought of himself as the group's ruler. The playful skits with the crown, the robe and the scepter were simply meant to entertain and amuse his followers. Unfortunately, he continued, he found out later that some of his critics didn't share his sense of humor.

> **The fact that we lived on the margins of society bothered many people. I would like to believe that it is not only in isolating oneself from that same society that one can contribute to improving it. Yet in returning to our roots we rediscovered a life of peace and serenity which is difficult to attain in the bosom of the society that we had abandoned. It was our inalienable right to step outside of society, but the means that we used were evidently too original in the eyes of those who forced us to return to "civilization." They could never bring themselves to believe that our life in the forest was normal, sane and deliberately chosen. Society does not permit people like us to escape because it refuses to acknowledge its own shortcomings. Its sole concern is to force back into line those who dare to question its values.**



Rock's release came in February 1984. He moved into Gisèle's apartment in Charlesbourg and immediately began to talk about returning to the bush. He promised that things would be different this time—he had stopped drinking and there would be no more violence. Besides, he reminded everyone, the law of God required them to follow him.

As eloquent as Rock was, he didn't fully persuade them at first. It wasn't that they had lost faith in his leadership. If God wanted them to follow their shepherd, who were they to disobey? On the other hand, there was the issue of creature comforts. For two relatively happy years they had enjoyed running water, a plentiful supply of heat in the winter and all the food their combined welfare cheques would allow them to buy. Compared to the Gaspé wilderness, the "world of the dead" didn't seem half bad.

Gisèle and the others pondered Rock's proposal for a while and then offered a compromise. Perhaps, they suggested tentatively, Moses might want to consider moving his tribe to a nice big farmhouse? Preferably one that was close to shopping—and right next to a road.

But as always, Rock had his own plan. Sitting in his sterile prison cell, he had had plenty of time to map out his future. The most important thing was to lead his flock out of Quebec, where they would be immune from the probation orders forbidding the convicted group members from associating with one another. They would also be rid of the child-protection workers, who had court orders allowing them regular housecalls. Beyond the border was a world culturally distant from rural Quebec, where all but one of his followers, Gabrielle, would find it impossible to converse with anyone outside the group.

One day in early April, Rock and his trusted sidekick, Jacques, hopped into a truck and headed west in search of the new promised land.

CHAPTER 12

THE SECOND COMING



While the masochistic person's dependence is obvious, our expectation with regard to the sadistic person is just the reverse: he seems so strong and domineering, and the object of his sadism so weak and submissive, that it is difficult to think of the strong one as being dependent on the one over whom he rules. And yet . . . the sadist needs the person over whom he rules, he needs him very badly, since his only feeling of strength is rooted in the fact that he is the master over someone.

—Erich Fromm,
Escape from Freedom

Rock had been gone only a few days when he placed a collect call to Gisèle in Quebec City.

"Mamy, you won't believe the good news," he announced triumphantly from somewhere in Ontario. She detected a devious edge to his voice, as though he had just fleeced someone out of his life savings.

"Let me guess," Gisèle answered. "Have you and Jacques found us a house?"

"Even better. We've bought a whole forest!"

Gisèle's heart sank.

"But, ahhhh, Papy," she inquired meekly, almost afraid to ask. "Is there a house there? Because I . . ."

"Well, there's nothing there now, of course. But we're going to build a house—just like we did in the Gaspé."

Gisèle closed her eyes and drew a deep breath. *Oh my God. Not again.* The idea of starting all over from scratch seemed bad enough to her, but the isolation would be even worse. And what if he went back to drinking? It was always when he was drunk that Rock's God ordered him to punish his subjects. Gisèle desperately wanted to cure his drinking problem for good so that he and his followers could live as the Master intended. She also felt sorry for him because of the illnesses he always complained about, and wanted to ease his suffering. But it wouldn't be easy to serve Moses in such primitive circumstances.

If Rock sensed any doubt in Gisèle, he didn't let on. He rhapsodized about how wonderful it was going to be to get away from concrete office blocks, transmission lines and the roar of the freeways. Soon they would be breathing the fresh clear air of the forest again and living off the land, the way the all-powerful Creator had intended.

Two hours later, it was settled. Gisèle hung up the phone and told the others to start packing.



Rock Thériault was not the first French-speaking pilgrim to sing the praises of the Victoria County landscape. "All this region is certainly very fine and pleasant," Samuel de Champlain wrote in his journal during his expedition through the region in 1615. After skirting the eastern shore of Georgian

Bay, Champlain and his men joined a flotilla of Huron and Algonquian war canoes in Lake Couchiching. They paddled south into Lake Simcoe and then east into the zig-zag chain of lakes and rivers that make up the Kawartha lake system. Champlain was struck by the beauty of the area. "Along the banks it seems as if the trees had been set out for ornament in most places; and it seems that all these tracts were in former times inhabited by the [Huron] savages, who were subsequently compelled to abandon them from fear of their enemies [the Iroquois]."

The war between the two Indian nations dragged on until the middle of the century, when the Iroquois pushed north and west toward Lake Simcoe, practically exterminating the Hurons. For several decades the Mohawk and other branches of the Iroquois Five Nations controlled central Ontario. Most historians today believe that the Iroquois finally retreated to the southern shores of Lake Ontario shortly after 1700, weakened by disease and by successive battles against the Algonquians and the French. Other accounts state that in 1740, a group of warriors belonging to the Mississauga tribe, a branch of the Algonquians, launched a bloody expedition against the Mohawk. In Victoria County, the two sides fought a series of ferocious battles. Early settlers reportedly found evidence of Indian ambushes in pits near the present-day town of Coboconk. By the time the fighting ended, the tall Mississauga warriors had gained control.

By 1763, the French had relinquished to Britain all claim to Canada. Within a generation, land-hungry settlers were arriving in Upper Canada. In 1818, the chiefs of six Mississauga tribes sold to the Crown more than four thousand square miles stretching across central Ontario. The Mississaugas

never recovered from the loss of their ancestral lands. Within a few years of the sale, smallpox, tuberculosis and measles had killed off all but about two hundred of them.

Almost immediately, surveyors began mapping out the newly acquired territory, gradually working their way northward. The first settlers were the lucky ones. The parcels of land they selected lay in the fertile plains south of the Kawartha Lakes. North of that water system, however, glaciers from the last Ice Age had scraped away much of the topsoil, leaving wide areas of bare limestone or granite interspersed with small lakes and swamps. The soil, where it existed, was often so thin that it was next-to-useless for large-scale farming. As a result, most of those who migrated to the northern half of Victoria County were forced to depend on its dense primeval forests. Between 1850 and 1880, settlers slashed away at the towering pines in a reckless campaign of clearcut logging. The eventual decline of local lumbering pushed many of them into poverty. Those with money and marketable skills moved away. All but a few of those who remained became subsistence farmers, scratching out a living in inhospitable conditions.

One of the poorest parts of Victoria County was the area that became known as Somerville Township. Tucked into the northeast corner of the county, it is criss-crossed by lakes and rivers and dotted with rock outcroppings. By the time the trees were cut down, the land was worth almost nothing. Around the turn of the century, the population began a slow but steady decline; only rarely did new families move in. Today, the only community of note wholly within the boundaries of Somerville Township is Burnt River, a depressed hamlet of a few dozen people with all the ambience of a ghost

town. Its principal attractions are two dilapidated general stores, a tiny post office, a small elementary school, two modest churches and a cemetery. Even now, most of the residents can trace their families back to the original Scottish and English immigrants who cleared the land and settled the area—staunch, God-fearing pioneers with names like Dudman, Rettie, Handley and Young. With the passing of the generations, the branches of their family trees gradually became intertwined. "It is well to speak kindly concerning the people of Burnt River," observed Gladys Suggitt, the author of a 1972 history of Somerville Township, "for the one to whom you speak is likely related to those of whom you speak."



Rock Thériault had two main objectives in mind when he began to hunt for land on which to establish his second commune. The property had to be cheap, and the area sparsely populated. Somerville Township fitted the bill on both counts.

It was a rainy morning in early April 1984 when Rock and Jacques pulled up in their rusting truck to the front door of Fred Hagen's real estate office in the town of Kinmount, fifteen kilometres north of Burnt River. Stepping across puddles in the parking lot, Rock led the way into the office while Jacques dutifully followed close behind. The only agent on duty that day was Manfred Dzedzitz, a forty-seven-year-old German immigrant who spoke English with a heavy accent. Considering the weather, he thought, he was lucky to have a customer.

Dripping water on the floor, Rock shook Dzedzitz's hand and asked if there were any reasonably priced bush lots for sale—preferably set well back from the road. "We want something where no

one will bother us, and we won't bother anyone else," he explained. Jacques stood by silently, not understanding a word of the conversation.

As it happened, Dzidzitz had for months been trying to unload a two-hundred-acre, partially cleared parcel of land a few kilometres east of Burnt River. It was landlocked, about two kilometres from the nearest road, with not even a proper road to the property over any of the neighboring lots. The owner, a Toronto businessman named John Sokol, had been using it to graze cattle, but was getting out of the business after a disagreement with his local partner. Since the land was virtually useless for anything else except duck hunting, the price was a very affordable twelve thousand dollars.

Rock lit up with interest. He wanted to see the place straight away, so Dzedzitz grabbed an umbrella and a pair of rubber boots and chauffeured the two potential buyers to a point along the highway where they could pick up a rutted tractor trail to their destination: Lot 4, Concession 5. Trudging across muddy fields and through forests of pine, birch and maple, they arrived shortly after 1 p.m. and spent most of the afternoon touring the site. Rock chatted the whole time, explaining that his family had been booted off their land in Quebec by heartless government officials. Now they just wanted to be left alone so they could live off the land. The lack of any hydro or telephone service didn't trouble him at all. He was more interested in the fact that the lot had about forty acres of maple trees. Rock said he and his family were hoping to earn a bit of money selling maple syrup; they could grow their own vegetables by building plastic-sheet greenhouses in one of the clearings.

Back at the car, Rock was effusive with gratitude toward Dzidzitz for taking the trouble to show



When Rock visited his parents, he had to plead with his father to get in the door. Hyacinthe was ashamed of his son for marrying so many women. (left to right: Gabrielle Lavallé-Rock, Hyacinthe and Pierrette Thériault, Chantal Labrie.)



Claude and Solange on their wedding day, with Claude's parents Juliette and Alphonse. Solange was cool to the idea of marrying Claude. Having grown up in the shadow of a violent, alcoholic father, she had problems with men and sex.

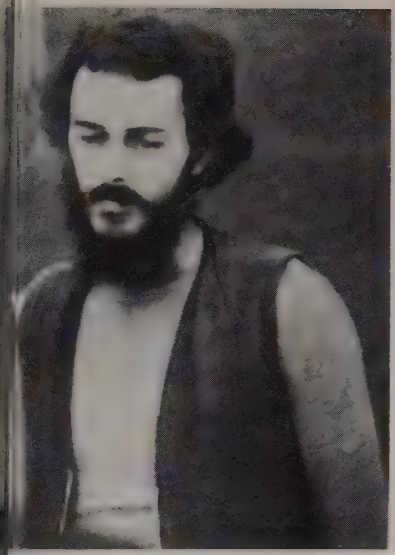


Solange with her parents, shortly before her murder.

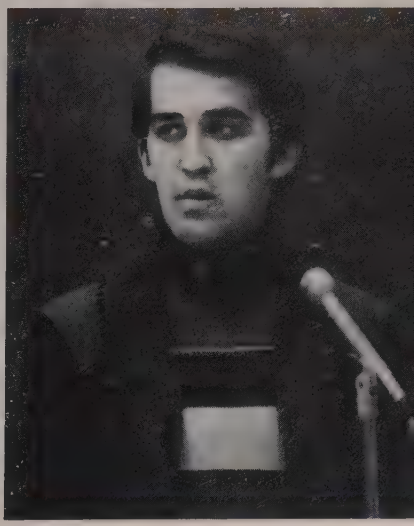




A born entertainer, Rock regaled his followers with outlandish skits. He liked to dress up in a turban or a biker's leather jacket, or grab a hose and pretend to be a lounge singer.



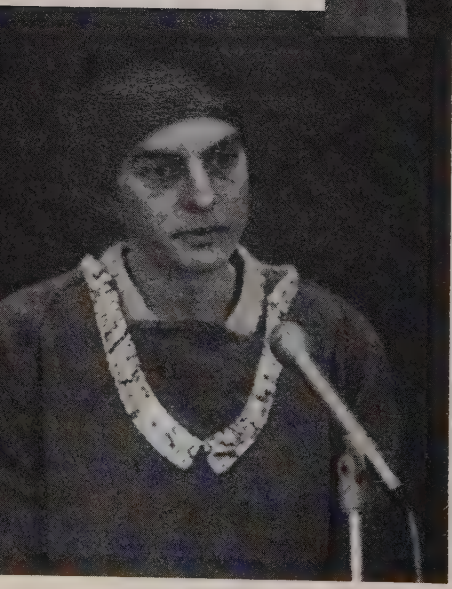
As a jobless 24-year-old, Claude Ouellette walked into a discotheque in his home town and tried to pick up Francine Laflamme. "I was tired of hanging out with the same old people and being stoned," he explained later.



Guy Veer at Samuel Giguère's inquest. Rock claimed that Veer had beaten the infant to death.

When Maryse Grenier began to talk about leaving the commune, Rock ordered her severely disciplined.





After joining the commune, Gabrielle could scarcely stop talking about herself, her expertise as a nurse and her exotic trips to far-off lands. She was less proud of her stint as a stripper in L.A.



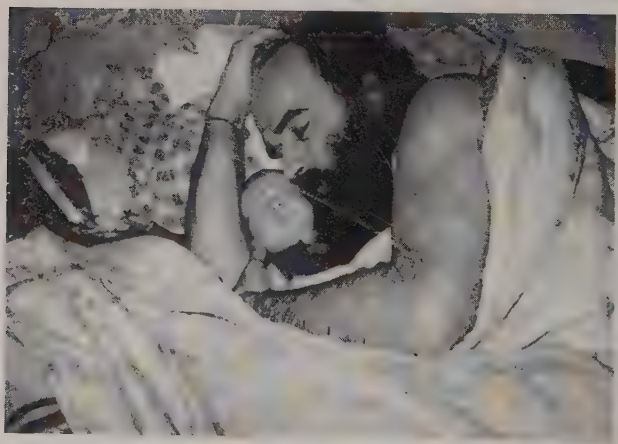
Moses enjoying breakfast in bed. He often slept in while his subjects worked like animals.

To "prove" that his followers had plenty to eat, Rock took this picture of the group with plates piled high. (*Clockwise from left:* Gisèle, Josée, Francine Nicole, Chantal, Claude, Jacques, Gabrielle and Marise.)



In their desire to drop out of society, Rock's followers had much in common with the flower children of the 60s and 70s. They had a cause. Most viewed it as the first meaningful accomplishment in their short and otherwise undistinguished lives.





Between 1985 and 1993, child-protection authorities seized 23 of Rock's 28 children. A court-appointed psychologist said that Rock "would demonstrate how the penis worked by masturbating in front of the children. But he didn't do it for his own satisfaction, he did it as a form of education."



Moses ruled his subjects like a vengeful god.



The Ant Hill Kids king with a crown of feathers.



Often Rock made love to one woman while two or three others rubbed his body.



Rock and his harem. (*Clockwise from front left:* Solange, Gabrielle, Chantal, Marise, José, Francine, Nicole, Gisèle.)



Rock removed one of Claude's testicles and circumcised Jacques (*right*).



The commune leader with U.S. psychiatrist Jess Groesbeck. After visiting Burnt River, the doctor praised Rock's "spiritual comradeship and friendship."



Rock was immensely proud to be playing host to the eminent psychiatrist.



Moses at Toronto's Pearson Airport, leaving for France. (Left to right: Jose, Marise, Solange, Rock, Francine, Chantal, Gisèle, Nicole.)

TOM SMART/GAMMA LIAISON



Alex Joseph and his nine wives. "The minute I made it known that I was available to this lifestyle," the Utah polygamist boasted, "I got more marriage proposals than I could possibly accept."

ERIN ELDER



CERTIFICATE OF

Ordination and Appointment

Rock Thériault

is ordained an agent of Melchizedek
to serve in His lawfull dominion in the office of
Elder-Apostle
in His Priesthood

And, further is appointed and set apart
to serve in the office of
King
in the Kingdom of God in the lawfull dominion of its realm.

DATED this 30th Day of the 2nd Season of the 10th year.

ADMINISTRATOR

KING OF ISRAEL

The certificate Alex Joseph gave Rock after ordaining him king.



The gun-toting polygamist presided over an elaborate ceremony in which Rock "married" four women, two of them dead. (*Left to right:* Gisèle, Rock, Alex Joseph.)



Rock worried that if Francine gave birth in Canada, the child would be taken away. "Well, if you brought 'em down here," Alex Joseph replied, "the government won't get 'em."



The commune nurse two weeks before Moses hacked off her arm.

ERIN ELDER



To cauterize Gabrielle's stump, Rock heated a three-inch section of drive shaft until it glowed a fiery red.

ERIN ELDER



Using a carpet knife, the commune leader methodically carved out small chunks of flesh from Gabrielle's arm.



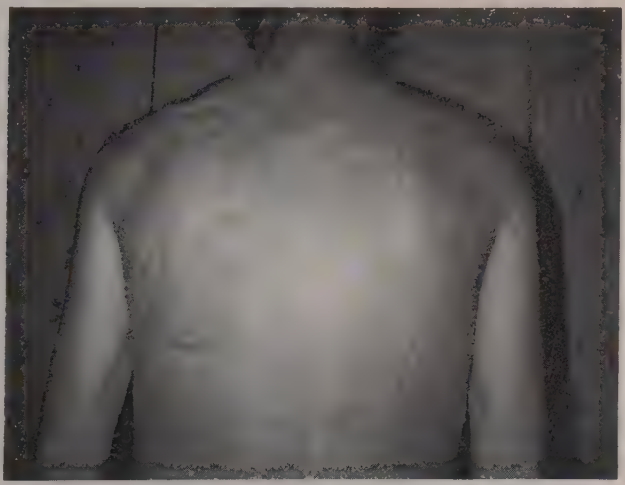
Before cremating Solange's body, Rock removed one of her ribs to make a necklace.



To punish errant disciples, Rock sometimes ripped out their teeth.



At the commune, police found collections of human and animal teeth stored in a plastic margarine tub and a burlap pouch.



Rock permanently disfigured his wife Josee by taking a welding torch to her back.



ERIN ELDER

Detective Constable Bob Bowen of the Ontario Provincial Police, who arrested Rock and charged him with murder.



Nicole on the day of her arrest with her commune baby. Even after her release from prison, she remains a loving disciple of Rock.

them the land on short notice and on such a wet day. He reached into his pocket and fished out a ten dollar bill, handing it to the agent with a warm smile.

"I'd never had that experience before," Dzidzitz recalled. "A lot of people don't even say thank you when you show them a property, they just walk away. So I thought to myself, *Okay, I owe this guy something.* I was so impressed by his manner. He seemed like such a nice man."

About a week later, on Friday, April the thirteenth, Rock returned to Kinmount and asked the agent to write up an offer in Jacques' name for the full asking price. The terms were a 100 dollar cash deposit and another 1,900 dollars on closing; the vendor would take back a five-year mortgage for ten thousand dollars, with monthly payments of 141 dollars.

Sokol accepted the offer four days later.



Rock was so impatient to leave Quebec that he did not even wait for the deal to close on May 18. On May 2, he and his entire band of followers—Jacques and Claude, as well as the nine women and ten children ranging in age from thirteen months to fifteen years—arrived at the site in Rock's battered truck. Slapping at clouds of blackflies and mosquitoes hatched in the surrounding marshes, they immediately pitched army tents and fashioned a crude shelter out of the rusting hulk of an abandoned bus.

Rock's construction know-how had improved considerably since 1978. He designed and built a rudimentary sawmill that consisted of a wooden frame and a chainsaw blade powered by a snowmobile engine. An ingenious rig hooked up to the pedals of an old bicycle allowed Jacques and Claude to

feed logs into the blade and cut them into beams and boards. Before long, the clearing that Rock had chosen as the site of the compound was covered with huge piles of two-foot diameter logs, stacks of freshly milled lumber and several tons of boulders collected from nearby fields and riverbeds. Another of Rock's inventions was a large treadmill used to pump water from a spring on a neighbor's property. Every few days, one of his eight wives would take a pony that had been purchased from a local farmer and hitch it to a crude wooden wagon. When she arrived at the spring, she would lead the pony onto the treadmill and wait while water gushed into two twenty-five-gallon plastic drums.

As in Quebec, it was backbreaking work, especially for the four "wives" who were pregnant that summer—Gabrielle, Francine, Josée and Solange. Even when it was hot and humid, most of the commune members wore long pants, long-sleeved sweaters and bags made out of mosquito netting over their heads to shield themselves from the ever-present swarms of blood-thirsty insects. When they weren't chopping down trees and lugging boulders around, the members were scooping catfish out of the rivers or tending a large fenced garden of cabbages and other vegetables.

The first completed building was a small A-frame cabin insulated with moss and cedar sawdust to keep away mice. That was followed by a larger, two-storey house with a kitchen and, on the lower level, Rock's personal sleeping quarters, complete with a rusted bathtub salvaged from the township dump. Next came a bakery, a smokehouse, a maple sugar shack and a fifteen-by-thirty-five-foot root cellar dug into the side of a small hill. Of greatest importance to Rock was his private "sanctuary"—a four-foot-high column of flat stones at the base of a giant

cedar about eight hundred meters from the main dwellings. It was there that Rock claimed to speak to God.

Five months after their arrival, the group moved out of the tents and into the new buildings. Rock drew up a worklist and assigned roles to each of the adults reflecting their status in the commune hierarchy. During the last two years in Quebec, Solange had supplanted Gisèle as Rock's closest confidante, although the two women had since become close friends—drawn together by their similar forthright personalities and their impatience with some of Rock's more obsequious followers, including Nicole and Chantal. Now that they were settled again, Solange kept the books, made sure the chores were done and acted as an arbiter of disputes. She was also the only wife permitted to enter Rock's sanctuary.

Next came Gisèle, surrogate mother to all of the other wives and "grandmother" to the ever-increasing brood of children. Chantal was Rock's personal chef, with the added responsibility of washing and laying out his clothes. As with Gisèle and Solange, her high status generally exempted her from having to perform heavy outdoor work. Nicole, the only woman who had not given birth to one of Rock's children, worked under Chantal's supervision. Her principal duty was to keep Rock's bedroom spotlessly clean.

Another of Rock's personal attendants was Francine, his masseuse and the person responsible for giving him baths and showers. On top of that, she had to prepare meals for all of the other commune members and was in charge of the bakery.

At the bottom of the totem pole were those classified as "outside workers." Josée was in charge of collecting firewood and keeping the stoves hot,

while Marise Lambert was the only female driver and was usually the one Rock asked to cut his hair. Jacques and Claude carried out a variety of outdoor assignments, from feeding the animals to repairing broken machinery.

Gabrielle, in addition to her nursing duties, worked in the garden and served as interpreter whenever visitors showed up. Because of that, outsiders tended to assume that she was one of Rock's favorites. But in fact he treated her harshly, particularly when she demonstrated her superior knowledge of medicine in front of others. The rest of the group considered her mouthy and untrustworthy.

Jacques' wife, Maryse Grenier, was the lowest of the low. In an effort to weaken their marriage bond and remove any threat to his own exalted status, Rock had forbidden the two to sleep together. Maryse was the kind of woman who would talk back to her husband, a quality that Rock detested. Every time she did, Rock would taunt Jacques and incite him to beat her. "You don't know how to treat your woman like a wife," he would say. Dutifully, Jacques would pummel Maryse with his fists, looking to Rock for approval. Maryse still had feelings for her husband and learned to accept the beatings, telling herself that she had sinned. Rock even convinced him that a birthmark on her stomach looked like "666," the mark of the Anti-Christ.

Eventually, Rock ordered Maryse to live apart from the group in her own hut with her two surviving children, Miriam and Jeziel. Neither she nor her children were allowed to mix with the others, even at mealtime. That arrangement persisted until Miriam, the oldest female child on the commune, was accepted into the main group by Rock and assigned to live in the men's cabin with her father, Claude

and Rock Jr. From that point on, Maryse was not allowed to associate with her daughter.

As regimented as Rock's organizational chart was, most outsiders saw only a loose, happy-go-lucky facade. As word of the back-to-the-land commune spread through Somerville Township, curious neighbors began to visit the site and introduce themselves. Some even pitched in, helping to mill lumber or clean fish.

It didn't take long for local residents to realize that there was something unusual about the new arrivals. On the rare occasions when shoppers in Burnt River managed to strike up a conversation with one or another of the women, she would invariably describe herself as one of Rock's wives. Still, the general feeling seemed to be that Rock and his band of flower children should be left alone to live as they pleased. All things considered, they seemed like decent, hardworking neighbors. Granted, they were a bit on the eccentric side, but in a place as tradition-bound as Burnt River that was no cause for complaint. "Those girls worshipped Rock," one neighbor said. "When they got out to the road to go to town, the girls would take their rubber boots off and change into their street shoes. Then they'd get him ready. One would put on his shoes, another his jacket, and someone else would brush his beard. It was really something to see how they fussed over him."

For others, the group was a welcome source of titillation and mild amusement. Local farmers and laborers would smirk, nudge each other and make crude jokes about how "Rocky" must be getting tired, what with all those "family chores" he was called on to perform each night. They'd wonder if he "serviced the girls" one at a time or in one big writhing orgy on the cabin floor.

A front-page feature in the *Fenelon Falls Gazette* that autumn was full of admiration for the group's grit and determination. Evidently taking care not to sound too judgemental, writer Debi Halcovitch even managed to make Rock's establishment of a personal harem sound like just another quirky lifestyle choice.

Exclusive:

SELF-SUFFICIENCY LEAVES FAMILY POOR

Recently settled in the Burnt River area is a small group of French-Canadians who have chosen to live their lives in an era out of the past. . . .

Their lifestyle of sharing and working as one unit is a reminder of the communes so popular with the "flower children" in the 60s and 70s, but their belief in having one man rule the household and father the majority of the children through different "wives" lends a different air to this communal lifestyle.

The bush and farmland of the Burnt River area lended [sic] itself perfectly to Rock's desire of homesteading and in the spring of 1984, two hundred acres of landlocked property was purchased so that he and his followers could establish a summer encampment. Access to the property is impossible by car. A four-wheel drive vehicle must be utilized to travel the four-mile bush road which has become worn and rutted from use. Mud holes, gates, a creek and low hanging branches hinder accessibility. . . .

During the summer of 1984, the industrious men, women and children lived in tents, raised goats and chickens, planted a large garden and

constructed their four permanent log cabins for protection against the harsh winter weather. They built a grist mill to grind corn and grain, a sawmill for the production of building materials, fetched water from the nearby creek and constructed wooden tables, beds, and chairs by hand. Rock Thériault's desire is to give his children a heritage. He believes children should be raised in the country. Rock, a philosophical man, believes in God, a natural life, and working with his hands. He and his group want to live apart from society. . . .

Our interview with Rock Thériault took place in one of the log buildings which is considered the community kitchen where all the food is prepared. Vegetables are stored in a root cellar which was dug by hand. A wood stove supplies ample heat and kerosene lamps light the room. Rock sat in a hand-crafted rocking chair, occasionally picking up one or two of his young children, who refer to him as "Papa." Rock Thériault fathered ten of the twelve children in their community. Rock explains, "I love children." [His wives] tend to the children, cook, clean, fetch water, milk goats, mend clothing, stoke fires and have more babies. The majority of the women cannot speak English so they remained in the background, quiet and apprehensive. According to Rock, these women and himself have the same desire to produce children. He does not consider these women "wives" in the conventional sense of "belonging to" or "property." Rock explained, "I love the women and they love me. It's natural. Babies come." Three more infants are due in the new year

and all the babies will be born by natural childbirth on their settlement. . . .

To date none of them have sought outside work. The women will make crafts and Rock plans to create handcrafted furniture for their income. Living off the land will provide food, water and wood for sustenance, but some finances are necessary for survival. In the words of Rock Thériault: "I have chosen this way of life. I know I am destined to suffer. Any person who believes in something with his heart which is different from others, there will be suffering."



One thing Rock hadn't bargained for, however, was the steadfast refusal of the Victoria County social services office to give in to his requests for welfare. Only days after the group's arrival, Jacques and Maryse had driven into the town of Lindsay, forty-seven kilometers south of Burnt River, and applied for family benefits. "Every time they'd come into Lindsay to pick up their cheques," recalled one local official, "we'd be missing soap and toilet paper from the washrooms. Then, they applied for social assistance for all of them. With all those kids, well, there was concern." Indeed, the county staff proved to be far less sympathetic toward Rock and his followers than were the commune's neighbors in Burnt River. After several closed-door meetings and phone calls to Toronto, they decided to deny them benefits on the grounds that they were an "institution" rather than a family.

To Rock, the solution seemed simple. He gathered his disciples around him one night and explained that the unbelievers in their midst were bent on destroying God's people. But the all-power-

ful Master would not abandon his children. If the infidels refused to provide assistance to the meek of the earth, they would simply have to help themselves to whatever they needed. After all, everything in existence belonged ultimately to God. It wasn't really stealing; it was simply a matter of taking what was rightfully theirs in the first place.

In case anyone still had any doubts, Rock hastened to add that the storeowners' insurance policies would cover any losses. Truly God worked in mysterious ways.

It didn't take long for Rock's message to sink in. But just so there would be no mistakes in carrying out the Lord's will, he wrote out detailed shopping lists for each of his followers. At the top of each he wrote, "Items to be stolen in the name of the Eternal." On one occasion, Jacques' assignment was to seize "spices, cheese, one celery, four pimentos, two pounds of mushrooms, four to five pounds of ground beef, tomato sauce, tomato paste, cream of tomato, tomato sauce, soya sauce, fat (suet), Pepsi, four rolls of toilet paper, unsalted butter and mineral water." At the bottom of the list were the words, "May the spirit of the Almighty, which blesses our father David, be with us."

The shoplifting expeditions began on a small scale, but they soon had developed into virtual orgies of petty thievery. In Kinmount and Fenelon Falls, shopkeepers learned to keep a close eye on Rock's followers from the moment they strolled through the door. "If it wasn't nailed down, they'd grab it and stuff it into their jackets," one merchant recalled. "They had these long overcoats with big pockets sewn inside so they could steal a whole bunch of things in one trip." When they were caught, they were usually let off with a warning.

As the storeowners in nearby communities wised

up to the shoplifting ring, Rock began to send his light-fingered agents further afield. On January 31, 1985, the law finally caught up with them. At 10:15 a.m., Constable Wayne English was picking up some groceries at the A & P grocery store in the Lindsay Square mall when he observed a scruffy, bearded man placing jars of mustard into one of his coat pockets. He tipped off a store employee, who stopped the thief after he left the store. English then placed the shoplifter, who identified himself as Jacques Giguère, under arrest. In the next hour or so, police also rounded up Gabrielle, Claude, Nicole and Rock Jr., each of whom was loaded down with stolen wares. Nicole's pockets contained ten pounds of ground beef, while Rock Jr. had somehow managed to coil fifty feet of rope around his waist. In the parking lot, the cops searched Claude's AMC Hornet and found the trunk piled high with stolen goods from five stores. The haul included gas-line anti-freeze, cat food, bolts, hack-saw blades, electrical tape, Salada teabags, several large packages of hamburger meat, peanut butter, sardines, minced garlic, garlic salt, Black Magic chocolates, toothpaste, butcher cord, sewing needles, thread, elastics, pens, writing paper and Crayola crayons. Total value: $453.37.

Considering the size of the take, they got off lightly. The judge banned them from shopping in Lindsay ever again. They also had to perform 100 hours of community service, which they did by cleaning up the local fairground.

Feeling himself caught in a financial squeeze, Rock began to backslide on one of his most precious tenets. From the time he'd gathered the group together in 1977, he had encouraged his followers to hate and reject their parents. Their families, like everyone else outside the commune, lived in Satan's

realm, and thus were Satan's instruments. The only true father was God the Master, and their biological parents were illusions. Only Moses had cared enough for their souls to rescue them from their lives of debauchery and shallow materialism.

Still, money was money. When it came to lining his own pockets, Rock's first principle was always flexibility. He began to pressure his disciples to phone or write letters to their parents asking for financial help. Coached by Rock, they would explain that the money wasn't for themselves, it was for the grandchildren they had never seen. If they loved the children, surely they would want to make sure they were adequately fed and clothed while the adults struggled to make ends meet without government support.

For Rock, it was a no-lose proposition. If the parents of one of the members caved in and made a contribution, he would naturally look after the money on the group's behalf. And if they refused, it would only reinforce what Rock had been saying all along—that the parents cared more about their bank accounts than about their own children.

Rock had taught them so well, in fact, that some of the women pleaded with him not to make them phone their families. Solange was one of them. She talked about how much she hated her father for beating her mother and frightening her as a small child. She never wanted to see him or hear his voice again. But all Rock could think about was the small fortune that Monsieur Boilard had been sitting on ever since the sale of the family farm. At first he punished Solange for refusing to contact her family by assigning her more onerous chores. When that didn't work, he reversed course and tried to persuade her that her dad was actually a decent, hard-working man whose admittedly boorish behavior

was the by-product of a stressful life. "You have a *good* father," he would tell her. "He worked hard for his family. If you keep refusing him, he will die with a broken heart."

Every few months, Solange would give in. She even began to develop a grudging respect for the old man. But never once did the family succumb to her requests for money. On one occasion she asked her father for her share of the family's savings, then about two hundred thousand dollars. He refused, saying that if she wanted the money she would have to leave the commune permanently. Solange, however, didn't give up. "She called everyone in the family for money," Gisèle Martineau said. "Me, my parents, brothers, even an aunt. We had a family policy never to send her money because we knew it was going straight to Thériault. But the many times she called collect, we never once refused to accept the charges. If we could have done anything for her and her children, we would have done it."

Nicole had even less luck with her father. "She called a few times wanting money for some business the group was in," he recalled. "She wanted her inheritance but I wouldn't give it to her. I told her to wait until I was dead. Then she and the others could share what was left."

Back at the commune, the need for income was growing ever more desperate. Predictably, the soil had turned out to be too poor to produce enough vegetables to get them through the winter. They tried selling crafts from an abandoned service station in Kirkfield, a small town twenty-five kilometers west of Burnt River. When that didn't produce the expected windfall, Rock figured he'd go into the fruit business. Every so often, he or Jacques or Claude would drive down to the Niagara peninsula, Ontario's fruit belt, and bring back a load of apples,

peaches, pears, strawberries and other produce. Commune members would then fan out to make-shift fruit stands on roadsides around the area. On summer weekends, they could usually count on selling hundreds of pounds of fruit to local residents and Torontonians passing through the area to and from their cottages.

The success prompted them to form their own company. Rock called it the Ant Hill Kids because, he explained, they worked together like a colony of busy little ants. The money they earned from selling fruit went to buy second-hand equipment for their bakery in the middle of the bush: aluminum bowls, plastic cooling racks, metal pans and a large restaurant mixer that ran off electricity from a gasoline-powered generator. The stoves were ingeniously welded from forty-five-gallon oil drums. In the center of the room was a ten-foot-long table with a butcher's block top and galvanized pipes for legs. Francine and the other women would stand there for hours in the stifling heat, kneading bread, rolling out pie crusts and sculpting delicate pastries. At one point, Rock managed to get his hands on several big drums of fruit preserves which the British had declared surplus at the end of the 1982 Falklands War. For months the women used the preserves as pie filling.

According to Claude Ouellette, Rock was a born con-man. He could walk into some wholesalers' office empty-handed and, after a quick chat, walk out with his hands full. Hours later, he'd roll up to the compound with a truck full of fruit, meat, fish, cheese and flour.

He'd usually strike deals with wholesalers, many from down around the Toronto area. He'd convince them to give him their old or

damaged goods on a promise to pay later. He'd tell them he would either sell the stuff or use it in products, for the bakery or for making fruit preserves which we'd sell. He sold them on the idea that if they did him a favor now, he would consider doing future business with them. But he never followed through or paid what he owed.

At the time, we were impressed by his audacity. And when he came back to the camp with food—well, we were usually so hungry we didn't exactly complain.



As soon as a batch of bread or other baked goods was ready, the women would load up the truck and head off to one of the neighboring towns to begin selling door-to-door. Over time they expanded their territory to encompass every reasonably-sized town between Haliburton and the northern suburbs of Toronto, including Lindsay, Uxbridge, Aurora and Newmarket. On Saturdays they'd make the hour-long drive to Orillia and pull up to the outdoor farmers' market in a parking lot next door to the Opera House. Some of them would stay there selling bread and fruit from the back of the truck without a permit, while others would go from house to house in search of new customers.

For a while, life on Lot 4, Concession 5 was almost tolerable. There still wasn't nearly enough to eat: Rock kept strict control of their diets, often limiting them to corn and potatoes. But at least his destructive energies seemed to be channeled into making money and building up his commercial empire. As long as things were on the move, he appeared happy. Eventually, however, the sense of excitement and purpose that had surrounded the

building of the commune began to dissipate. And as boredom set in, Rock's mind turned to its darker impulses.

Just as Gisèle had feared, he began to drink again. He went back to his old habit during the first winter in the bush in Ontario, explaining that the pain in his stomach and intestines was so severe that he needed to reduce the suffering. He moaned and carried on constantly about his health, telling Gabrielle that his heart felt "like a broken dial mechanism." At night he'd lie in bed in a pool of sweat, shaking and having horrifying nightmares.

The sequence of events became all too familiar. Whenever he claimed to be in pain, he'd order Jacques or Claude to rush off to Coboconk for a couple of cases of twenty-four. After four or six beers he became talkative, boasting about how much money he had and how much property he controlled—the two-hundred-acre lot had somehow been transformed into a ten-thousand-acre swath of wilderness. Then he'd call on Chantal or Nicole to fetch his king's jewels from the bedroom. The "jewels" were worthless costume trinkets, but Rock would jabber on for hours about how rare and valuable they were. The rest of the commune members would pretend to be impressed, terrified that Rock would interpret any lack of interest as an insult.

When the evening was over, Rock would usually summon one or more of his wives into his bedroom. Often he made love to one woman while two or three others massaged his shoulders and rubbed his arms and legs. Sometimes all eight women stripped naked and joined him on the living room floor, while Mozart or Beethoven—two of his favorite composers—played out of a battery-powered tapedeck. After ejaculating, he would instruct the women to caress each other and masturbate while

he watched. Nicole, Chantal and Francine usually enjoyed the group sex games, while Gabrielle, Gisèle and Marise Lambert preferred to sleep with their master one-on-one.

Rock loved to foment jealousy and mistrust among his disciples, thereby strengthening his own control. A common tactic was to pick two wives who were particularly close—Nicole and Chantal, Gisèle and Solange or Josée and Marise—and play the women off each other by lavishing attention on one while ignoring the other.

To manipulate Josée and Marise, he would contrast their family backgrounds. Marise was a single child from a stable, affluent home, while Josée's parents had little money and often bickered.

"Josée, look at your friend Marise," Rock said once. "She comes from a nice home and her parents have all this money—she's used to having everything she wants. But you're satisfied with the simple things in life. You have nothing, but you have a big, generous heart." By the time Rock finished Marise was in tears. Josée, on the other hand, was flattered to be the object of such praise.

At other times, he used a more direct method of encouraging rivalry. Rock would get out his stop watch, draw a square in the dirt and call up two competitors, ordering them to go at each other for three minutes, naked and with no holds barred. "He counted the points," Jacques said. "One for a punch and minus one for stepping outside the line. The winner had to fight someone else and the games could go on for hours." Whenever Rock himself participated in the gladiatorial games, the rules were different. Opponents always knew that if they hurt Rock, their payback would come later.

"Sometimes he would put one of the guys in the middle and make all the women punch and kick

you," Claude recalled. "And let me tell you, after working in the woods for so many years some of those women had strong muscles. They could really hurt you."

Rock's drinking binges became progressively worse. Drunk and angered by some minor offense, he would announce that his followers were evil and needed to have the devil beaten out of them. At times, he grabbed an ax and struck whoever happened to be nearby on the legs or the head with the flat side of the blade. "I was sitting at the table one time and without warning he hit me on the forehead with a hammer," Marise Lambert recalled. "He wouldn't let me go to a hospital so Chantal stitched up the gash with a needle and thread."

One of his favorite punishments, besides beating and whipping offenders, was to order people to strip naked and lie on the floor while he urinated on their heads and in their mouths. "Sometimes he did it for fun, sometimes he did it because he was mad," Gisèle said. "He did it to me and he did it to everybody else." On several other occasions he forced Gabrielle to lick someone's anus after that person defecated and to smear her cheeks and forehead with feces.

Rather than running away in disgust after such episodes, the victim usually appeared contented, even happy. She had sinned, but Moses had disciplined her—and in so doing had restored her to God's favor. The very act of punishing his subjects demonstrated how much he loved them. And when the cruelty stopped, the tension between themselves and their master would be broken; they had done penance and the air was once again clear. In those moments, Gabrielle would beam with pride and talk about how much Papy loved her. After the punishment, Rock generally rewarded his target by

giving him or her temporary authority over the others.

To justify his violence, the commune leader frequently quoted from the *Book of Solomon.* "You didn't have to do much to be singled out for punishment," Jacques said. "Sometimes it was for being a few minutes late for supper or from running an errand into town." Once, Jacques fought back, punching Moses in the face and sending him flying over a pile of chairs. "I felt guilty for hitting our leader and went back to take my punishment. Otherwise everyone else would be upset with me, and I really loved the other people." Indeed, when the police interrogated Jacques several years later during their investigation of Rock's trail of brutality, the frightened man refused to say anything that would incriminate the others, including Rock. "I'll tell about what I did, but I don't want to talk about the others," he said. "I could have refused to do those things, but I did them and I'm ready to take responsibility for that."

Jacques' punishment for striking Moses was decided at one of the commune's frequent kangaroo court sessions. First, Rock would have one of the women—usually Solange or Chantal—dress him up in an elegant black tuxedo. They would place a chair on top of a table from which Rock would preside as the judge. Others would play the parts of prosecutor and defense lawyer, while the accused sat in a makeshift prisoners' box and awaited the judge's ruling.

For Jacques' punch, Rock handed down a sentence of circumcision. "I was ordered to sit in a chair and pull my pants down. Then he ordered someone to chop off my tip with a knife in one fell swoop. If that person hadn't done it, Thériault would have

taken care of it himself. And we all knew that it would have been much worse."

When Rock sobered up the next day, he would cry and wail like a baby with his head at their feet, begging his Master to stop commanding him to commit such brutality.

CHAPTER 13

ACT OF MERCY



It was after Rock and his followers showed up in Lindsay to apply for welfare that the staff at the Victoria County social services department got on the phone to their counterparts at the local child-protection office. They reported that a group of about twenty back-to-nature religious types from Quebec were camping out in tents on a bush lot near the hamlet of Burnt River. The colony included a fair number of kids, and several of the women were expecting. They didn't seem to be breaking the law, but it would be getting cold again in a few months and they would need adequate shelter. Just to be on the safe side, it might be wise to go in and have a look around.

On Monday, June 25, 1984, several social workers from the Kawartha-Haliburton Children's Aid Society (CAS) did just that. They arrived at the camp on foot to find the group hard at work building their miniature forest village. It wasn't the kind of life most people aspired to—no running water, no hydro, no telephone and no TV. Even so, the social workers had to admit that it was a beautiful setting, nestled in the woods and, when the chainsaw wasn't roaring, extremely peaceful. Not only that,

their leader seemed to know what he was doing. The buildings were solid and surprisingly well designed. Rock evidently had a talent for organization, and no one appeared to be slacking off.

Rock also proved to be a charming host. He immediately took the social workers on an extensive tour, boasting about how much land he owned and demonstrating how his crew was able to mill their own lumber from trees felled by hand. He was particularly proud of the efficiency of his building designs. The joints and roof tresses fit together so well that there was hardly any need for nails.

The surprised visitors asked if Rock was a carpenter by trade. Rock smiled impishly, acknowledging that he *had* done a fair bit of woodworking over the years. But a carpenter? No, that was more of a hobby than a vocation. His career, he explained, had followed an eclectic path. It had included some missionary work for the Seventh-day Adventist Church, a term as mayor in his hometown of Thetford Mines, four years as a paramedic and a remarkably successful stint as the proprietor of a health clinic near Quebec City. Above all, though, he was a man of letters. He mentioned more than once that his first book, a critique of modern civilization, had been published the previous fall and was already a best-seller in Quebec. Several more works on philosophy, religion and holistic living were at the printers.

Impressed by the group's industriousness, the social workers left and wrote up a report on their observations. Three weeks later, they closed the file on the Burnt River commune.

Later that summer, when the Children's Aid workers learned that Gabrielle and Francine had given birth in the bush without any medical followup, the CAS arranged for a team of public

health nurses to visit the site and conduct routine examinations of all the children. Apart from the fact that the kids had not received their shots, everything seemed okay. There were no obvious signs of mistreatment. If the group wanted to live in isolation from society, well, that was their democratic right.

The social workers' benign view changed dramatically on October 5, 1984.

A cross-Canada bulletin arrived that day from the Quebec government's Welfare and Youth Protection office, seeking information on the whereabouts of one Rock Thériault, thirty-seven, two male cohorts and nine female companions ranging in age from twenty-five to thirty-four. Five of the women had borne children in Quebec. And after one of those infants, a boy, had died from a beating, the Quebec authorities had obtained a court order giving them the power to supervise how the parents were caring for the rest of their children. One day in late spring, however, the group had vanished into thin air.

During a hastily arranged conference call to Quebec, the social workers in Lindsay heard how the one-time health-food fanatic had named himself Moses and trotted off to the Gaspé wilderness with a band of wide-eyed followers. It was there that Rock had developed a peculiar concept of hierarchy, part of which involved dividing the commune children into two races. His own offspring were "the pure children," favored by God and given extra privileges like comfortable beds and hot meals. The children whom Rock had not fathered were mere slaves to the rest of the group, forced to live like animals. Their parents were forbidden to show them any affection. In the Gaspé they were left in the care of an ex-psychiatric patient who had assaulted one of the children. As punishment, Rock

castrated him. Questions had been raised about Rock's role in the boy's death, and he had served eighteen months in jail for criminal negligence before being released on probation. Neither the supervision order nor Rock's probation terms, however, were enforceable outside Quebec.

The Lindsay CAS office promptly reopened its file. On a Saturday morning later that month, two social workers, Georgia Brown and Bob Galipeau, trekked into the bush with an Ontario Provincial Police constable, someone from the provincial Ministry of Community and Social Services and Bryce Young, the deputy reeve of Somerville Township and, coincidentally, the owner of an adjacent parcel of land.

Georgia Brown was immediately struck by what she saw. An astute thirty-four-year-old who had witnessed more family tragedies in the course of her work than most big-city homicide detectives, she prided herself on the fact that not much got past her. The first thing she noticed was how docile and apprehensive the women appeared. None of them would so much as open her mouth without a signal from their leader, a quiet but self-important man with a messianic aura. With his black, bushy beard and bald head, it looked as though he wore an upside-down face. Poked into the center of that striking visage were steely blue eyes that fixed on you like a pair of laser beams. He had a way of staring hypnotically at people that made them feel they'd been transported to the center of his personal universe. Everything outside that sphere faded into insignificance.

"One of the other things you noticed about Rock was that he didn't do a whole lot of work," Brown recalled. "He was often in his own cabin and he had total control over everything. He was viewed by the

other members of the group as the source of all knowledge—that was one of his titles. He told me that life was like a stream. If you went into the stream where other people had walked the water would be muddy and unclear. But if you went directly to the source of the stream it would be pure and clean. And he told me that I should come to him if I wanted to get to the source."

For starters, Rock said, there were all those lies and distortions being tossed around by the Quebec authorities about the tragic events involving poor Samuel Giguère and Guy Veer. The reality was simple: Veer was the one who had killed the boy. Veer himself, feeling guilty, had pleaded with Rock to castrate him. Unfortunately, the narrow-minded bureaucrats in Quebec City wouldn't stop persecuting Rock and his followers. Reluctantly, the group had decided to pull up stakes and move to Ontario, where people seemed to be more open to alternative lifestyles. All they wanted now was to be left in peace.

As Brown soon discovered, Rock had an extraordinary sexual hold over his female disciples. "He told me that he had one legal wife and the other women were his concubines—that was the word he used. The two other men were not allowed to have sexual relations. It was just like, *This is how we operate. We're a family.* I once asked him if the oldest girl in the group, who at the time was about eight or nine, would one day become one of his wives. He said he hoped that some day she would. I said, 'Well, how old will she be when that happens?' And he didn't answer. He just smiled, shrugged his shoulders and walked away."

Over the next year or so, Brown and one or another of her colleagues paid numerous visits to Rock's retreat. When the ground was bare, they

went in on foot. In the winter, they either trudged through the snow, used cross-country skis or borrowed snowmobiles. They supplied the group with bags of groceries, used blankets, fire-detectors, first-aid kits, diapers, food coupons, a two-way radio to call for help in case of emergency and one thousand dollars to buy boots and snowsuits for the children. The money was supposed to go to the mothers, but Rock insisted on taking it himself. If anyone was going to give things to the kids, it would be him. For all of his bombast, there was no doubt that Rock exuded a certain allure. On one visit, hoping to get into Brown's good books, he invited her into his quarters, took a guitar down off the wall and started crooning traditional Quebec folk songs.

But Brown saw right through Rock's transparent attempts to manipulate her. One of his most obvious ploys involved food. Early on, Brown had noticed that all of the food and cooking facilities for the group were in Rock's cabin, under his direct control. But never once did the commune members sit down to a meal in her presence. She got the feeling that Rock didn't want her to know how meager the servings were.

One winter day, concerned that the children were not getting enough to eat, Brown paid a visit to the compound with a ministry official. "We were met with a huge table laden with tarts and cookies and so on," she recalled. "He was putting on a show for us. He told us they had received an anonymous gift from the community, and here was the proof." The message was obvious. There was no need for the Children's Aid Society to keep poking its nose into the commune's affairs. Only later did Brown find out that the children were being raised on a diet of corn or cabbage three times a day, and only rarely tasted milk, cheese or any other dairy product. They

were close to starving, and yet they had been forbidden to touch even a crumb of the food put out for display.

After that encounter, relations between Rock and the CAS grew steadily worse. He began to insist on being notified in writing two days before each visit. If he was in agreement, he would leave a letter addressed to one of the social workers in the commune's mailbox on the highway.

Brown had a feeling that Rock was hiding something. Then, on January 26, 1985, something happened that amplified her suspicions. At about 9 or 9:30 a.m., in a light snowfall, Gabrielle wrapped her five-month-old baby boy, Eleazar, in a blanket and placed him in a metal wheelbarrow outside. The child was left there unattended until around 10:45. The temperature that morning in Burnt River was minus 10°C. When the mother returned, the baby was blue and had stopped breathing. An ambulance was called on the commune's two-way radio, but it was too late. Eleazar was pronounced dead on arrival at Ross Memorial Hospital in Lindsay.

The coroner, a local doctor named Al Lackey, filed a report days later concluding that the child had died as a result of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome—commonly known as crib death. Eight years later, however, the OPP file on the death remains open and the chief coroner's office in Toronto is still reviewing the case. Lackey, for his part, refuses to discuss his findings beyond saying that he stands by them.

Since that report, however, Gabrielle has told investigators that Rock hated her son and struck him often during his brief life. He complained incessantly that the boy was a burden to him and that he bore the "mark of Satan" because one of his eyelids was slightly deformed. It would be best for everyone

if he died. When the baby did pass away, Gabrielle saw it as an act of mercy: "I felt this would relieve his suffering."

Two days after the death, Rock signed the authorization form to have Eleazar's body cremated. But some of the social workers at the Children's Aid Society weren't prepared to write the episode off so easily. Brown, for one, was convinced that the baby had not died accidentally. From the moment of her first contact with the group she had sensed that something terrible was going on at Rock's compound. But the more she talked about it, the more her friends and co-workers looked at her as if she had lost her marbles. She was taking the whole thing a little too personally, they said. Perhaps she just needed a vacation.

Fortunately, her supervisor was not among the skeptics. Evelyn Coskie had heard about a nonprofit group in Toronto that kept tabs on cults, the Council on Mind Abuse (COMA). After consulting with her bosses at the ministry to ensure that it was not a front for the Moonies or the Church of Scientology, she gave COMA a call.

Two of COMA's founders, Ian and Christine Howarth, drove up to Lindsay a few days later to meet with Brown and another social worker. Brown laid out everything she'd seen and heard about Rock's group: the polygamy, the constant monitoring of group members, the division of the commune children into two classes, the use of Biblical names, the isolation from society and the members' own families, the control and rationing of all food, and the acceptance of one person—"Moses"—as the source of all knowledge. When Brown had finished speaking, Ian Howarth turned and looked at his

wife. "Christine," he said in a matter-of-fact voice, "I think we've got ourselves a cult."

"It was an incredible relief to hear that," Brown recalled years later. "I had a lot of credibility in the community, but for months I'd been feeling like I was screaming down a well. Nobody seemed to want to believe that this group was dangerous. Finally, there was someone who was willing to listen and not look at me like I was out of my mind."

Over the next two hours, Ian and Christine gave the CAS workers a crash course in cults and how they operated. According to the Howarths, most cult recruits are young, middle-class, idealistic and spiritually curious. Often they have experienced some kind of trauma—childhood abuse, separation from their families, the death of a loved one or the failure to achieve some important objective. Many seem to be searching for a new identity that will allow them to abandon their existing responsibilities and place all their emotional and physical needs in the hands of a self-appointed, charismatic leader. Psychiatrists call these potential converts "seekers," people who are looking for some mystical or fantastic belief to fill up their lives.

Cult leaders have no such doubts about their own self-worth. They may have suffered at one time in their lives, but they have overcome their trials and are only too eager to share their profound insights with others. Behind the façade of humility lies supreme arrogance. Dynamic and blessed with a persuasive manner, a great leader can inspire profound allegiance to himself and his goals.

The key to any cult is the effective use of mind-control techniques—in other words, brainwashing. Usually, it begins with an effort by the leader to separate his followers from familiar surroundings and outside influences. Then the recruits are sub-

jected to a prolonged period of sensory bombardment to break down their defense mechanisms and create a state of intense suggestibility. Typically, that will include long hours of mental or physical exertion, sleep deprivation, lack of proper nutrition, the introduction of strange rituals, a group dress code and the constant repetition of the leader's doctrine in flamboyant, evangelical performances. By ordering his followers to bare their most embarrassing or humiliating secrets before the rest of the group, and then exaggerating their sins, the leader reinforces the need for "salvation."

The aim of all of those techniques is to destroy the followers' ability to think critically. Under the right conditions, a subject can regress to a helpless, infantile state in a matter of days. With their minds wiped clean, they are ready to accept the leader's new values, no matter how absurd or destructive. The group is everything, the individual nothing. Members believe that the ends justify the means, and that they are above the law as long as their actions meet with the leader's approval. Loyalty is maintained by fear—fear of outside forces that the leader proclaims as evil and dangerous, and fear of the leader himself, who often punishes his disciples savagely for the slightest negative thought, word or deed. Believing in the leader's righteousness, his victims endure practically any torment, no matter how painful or degrading.

According to the experts, the most dangerous cults have at their core a belief that current events are hurtling toward some kind of pre-ordained apocalypse. There are only two kinds of people: the doomed sinners and the enlightened saints. Led by a messianic figure, the members of such cults see themselves as God's army, waging war on the

devil's agents. In that kind of life and death struggle, people can bring themselves to do almost anything.

When the Howarths finished their presentation, Brown promised to move the file on the Ant Hill commune to the top of the pile. She would make it her personal mission to ensure the safety of those kids.

CHAPTER 14

THE CHOSEN AND THE DAMNED



Though men are not dogs, they should humbly try to remember how much they resemble dogs in their brain functions.

William Sargant,
Battle for the Mind

All his life, Rock Thériault had wanted to be the center of attention. Suddenly he was getting far too much of it—and the wrong kind. The cops and those damn social workers seemed to be crawling all over the place in the days after baby Eleazar's death. It was as if they didn't believe the coroner's report, which said that the child had died of natural causes. Why wouldn't everyone back off and leave him alone?

As his paranoia intensified, Rock tightened up on security. He now absolutely prohibited his followers from leaving the commune unaccompanied, even for a couple of hours. It was an extremely powerful form of control. Whether at the commune or in public, group members were constantly on their guard in case one of their companions felt inclined to scurry off to Moses and snitch on them for an alleged transgression—for example, leaving a few

crumbs on the bakery floor, or failing to collect enough firewood to heat the water for Rock's bath. There was no more effective way to demonstrate one's devotion to the leader than by informing on someone else. The message was clear: loyalty to Moses far outweighed any of the bonds that might exist among the followers. More so even than in any police state, it became impossible to trust anyone.

Rock conditioned his followers with the same clinical detachment that the Russian physiologist Ivan Pavlov used to train his dogs. Transgressors were beaten, forced to jump naked into ice-cold water or otherwise tortured. Meanwhile, Rock would give the informer extra food rations or new rubber boots to replace a pair that had worn out. Another form of positive reinforcement was to allow the favored adherent a few bottles of beer from the master's private stock, which he kept under lock and key.

In many cases, Rock also rewarded turncoats by assigning them the task of punishing people they had turned in.

Claude was punished more than most. Like others, he sometimes spoke about wanting to leave the commune—although in his case it never went beyond that stage. "You had to be very careful about what you said when you were working in a group because you never knew who was listening and who would turn you in," he said. "If you talked to someone about leaving, Thériault would somehow get wind of it. Then you knew you were in for a beating. Nicole and Chantal were the worst—they were always turning others in to score points with Rock. He'd reward them at the supper table by giving them his leftovers when everyone else was still hungry. The rest of us would have to watch this." As Rock's most reliable informers, Nicole and

Chantal escaped the worst of Rock's wrath. As close as they were, however, they were not beyond ratting on each other.

Solange was also quick to turn in misbehavers, and as such was infrequently punished. Still, the others resented her less than they did Nicole and Chantal. "One thing about Solange," Claude said, "was that she was not hypocritical. If she was going to tell Rock that you did something wrong, she let you know first. And she was usually right."

One of the clearest indications of Rock's refusal to allow his followers to venture out alone came a week after baby Eleazar's death. Rock got on the two-way radio and told the police that one of his concubines, Solange, had collapsed in the snow and was bleeding heavily from her vagina. She was eight months' pregnant. The cops put in a call for an air ambulance and sent several officers out on snowmobiles to pack the deep snow so that the chopper would have a place to land. When the medics arrived, however, Rock refused to let them take Solange unless one of the other women went along. Later that day, in Lindsay's Ross Memorial Hospital, Solange gave birth to her third child, a girl. In the entire time she was in hospital, there was never a moment when there wasn't at least one other commune member in her room.

Meanwhile, Rock was becoming more and more belligerent toward those outsiders whom he perceived as threats. On a Friday in late March 1985, Georgia Brown and another CAS worker skied in for a surprise visit to check up on the children. When they got there everyone was bustling around, preparing a festival to celebrate the spring equinox—one of several pagan rites Rock had woven into his religion. A crazy blend of mysticism and perverted Old Testament theology, it seemed to have little ra-

tionale other than to exalt Moses and mock the beliefs, symbols and rituals of the Catholic church.

Rock went berserk when he spotted Brown and her colleague. He refused even to speak to the interlopers. Jacques came out instead and barked at the two social workers in broken English to get the hell off the property. The fiery look in his eyes told them it was best not to argue.

By that point, Brown was inspecting the commune several times a month, looking for signs of trouble. When the snow melted, she hiked to the camp with a female co-worker. It was an eerie scene —the entire compound looked deserted, like a ghost town. Brown's colleague glanced at her anxiously and said, "Oh, God, I don't want to look in the window. I'm afraid it's going to be another Jonestown." When they finally screwed up their courage and peered inside, they saw that the cabins were empty. They were wondering what to do next when Jacques and Claude came bounding out of the forest. Jacques told them to leave, explaining that it was a religious day again and they were all having a picnic. As the two women headed back to the road, Rock himself stepped out into their path from behind a tree. He glared at them menacingly until they were out of sight.

It was always a toss-up whether to obey Rock or stand up to him. Once a male CAS worker reproached him for denying the children proper medical care. Rock's face turned red and the veins on his neck stood out. "If thine eyes offend thee," he growled, "smite them out." Unintimidated, the worker took a couple of steps forward and shoved his face into Rock's. "Is that what you want to do? Smite my eyes out?" he shot back. The two men stood glowering at each other for about three minutes, while Brown looked nervously at her running

shoes and wondered how fast they would carry her. But Rock blinked first. "You misunderstood me," he blurted out, and then walked away.

Equally disturbing was an incident that brought two OPP officers to the commune around dinnertime in June 1985. Even though it was a calm, sunny day, aircraft passing over the region had been picking up distress calls all afternoon warning of high winds and tornadoes. After much confusion, it finally dawned on the cops to check up on Rock. They found him straddling a stump, stark naked and drunk as a loon, hollering "Mayday, Mayday" into the handset of his emergency two-way radio. The rest of the commune members were cowering in the root cellar, terrified that the world was about to end. Rock had told them that Judgement Day had arrived and there would be a huge earthquake.

Exactly two weeks after that, a Family Court judge in Lindsay issued a supervision order granting the CAS the right to make unannounced visits to the commune. One of the conditions was that the parents had to enroll the three school-age children —Simon and Jeremiah, both six, and seven-year-old Miriam—in the public school in Burnt River.

But a month after classes began that fall, Rock yanked the kids out of school again, insisting that the authorities were trying to brainwash them. At the same time, he drummed into the children—there were now fourteen, with two more on the way —that the CAS staff were Satan's helpers. He would set the kids on his knee and explain to them how the social workers had been born with "the hearts of dogs." Whenever Brown and her colleagues showed up, the children would become distressed and cry, or scream and run away. The parents just stood around, making no effort to comfort the frightened young ones.

Apart from those outbursts, however, the kids were abnormally passive. "I remember once, the children were sitting at a table upstairs in one of the cabins that was doubling as a schoolroom," Brown said. "Solange was supposed to be their teacher. Most of the children were under five, but they just sat at that table and colored. They never moved or uttered a sound. There was a two-year-old and you could put him on a couch with toys all around him and he wouldn't move. He would sit there for hours if you let him." Barely old enough to speak, the boy displayed the classic symptoms of an abused toddler.

The kids were like little zombies. On another occasion, a bee stung one of Rock's younger children, a fifteen-month-old girl. The baby was screaming from the pain, but Rock just walked over to her and placed the palm of his hand on her forehead—the location, he taught his followers, of the "third eye." The child immediately fell silent.

Betty-Jean Moyle, a social worker who was one of Brown's supervisors, remembered seeing the commune members outside one summer day. "At first it was an enjoyable scene," she said. "Everyone was going about their business. About half-an-hour after I arrived it hit me like a thunderbolt—the whole thing was totally out of whack. None of the children cried, none of them laughed, none of them ran to their mothers or competed for toys. They were floating around with angelic smiles on their faces making no demands on adults. None of the normal stuff happened. They were completely under Rock's control."

After years of gradually escalating abuse, deprivation and psychological torture, Rock's followers had become habituated to elevated levels of violence. On the occasions when they did allow themselves

to think about leaving, their minds were usually frozen by fear. By the time they screwed up their courage, the latest bout of brutality had blown over and Rock had become a warm and playful father figure again, rewarding them with special privileges. Often, he claimed he couldn't remember what he had done the night before, and he'd ask the others to remind him. Then he would apologize profusely and explain, in tears, that it was the Master of Life and Death who had directed him to punish them for their sins. The sight of their leader in anguish would fill Rock's victims with guilt for having blamed their suffering on Moses. Feeling small and worthless, they persuaded themselves that their injuries were justified and served some higher purpose.

By the same token, Gisèle and the others were convinced that there was no escape from Rock's Master. Even if they left and never came back, God would find them and strike them down. Once, without getting Rock's permission, Gisèle caught the bus to Quebec to visit her parents. All the way home she trembled, fearing that God would punish her by allowing the bus to crash.

Gisèle also could not bring herself to abandon her son. In the late summer of 1985, several months' pregnant with her next child, she told Jeremiah that the two of them were going on a picnic. Jeremiah, who was then six, saw right through the story and refused to leave his father. When she told the boy the truth, that she wanted to take him to his grandfather's house in Quebec, Jeremiah started to cry. He promised Gisèle that if they stayed, he would ask his father not to beat her. Realizing the escape attempt was hopeless, Gisèle pleaded with her son not to tell Rock. She invented a game to conceal the plot, telling Jeremiah that he could reveal the secret

to his father only when he had learned enough to tell the story in English.

By now Rock had become an expert at turning the children against their own mothers. Once when Gisèle disobeyed Rock, he ordered Jeremiah to punch her in the face. "I was on my knees in front of Rock begging him not to talk to my son that way," Gisèle recalled. "But my words had no effect. When Jeremiah followed his instructions, it broke my heart."

The one woman who did manage to break away from the commune was Jacques' wife, Maryse Grenier. More than a year earlier Rock had ordered her to live apart from her husband, thereby ensuring that the marriage would not be a threat to his domination of the group. Ever since, Maryse had begged Moses, in vain, to let her leave. As her pleas became more insistent, however, Rock decided that Maryse was a morale problem. Worse, there was a danger that her discontentment would spread to Jacques. Finally, in October of 1985, Rock allowed Maryse to leave—while insisting that Miriam stay behind. The proof that Maryse was evil, he said, was that she'd had a dream in which she was the Pope. "Rock thought that she was the devil, so we did, too," Gisèle said. "She even looked like the devil. But perhaps she was just scared because Rock and Jacques beat her."

With her two youngest children, Jeziel, two, and Thomas, who had been born a few months earlier, Maryse went straight to her parents' house in Ste.-Marie. Maryse's father was shocked by her ravaged appearance, and by the behavior of his grandchildren. Jeziel crawled around on all fours like an animal and slept curled up in a ball. Both children's stomachs were swollen, like victims of a Third World famine.

When the social workers in Lindsay found out

about Maryse's escape, they asked COMA to recommend a cult expert who could help her readjust to normal life. The main thing she needed was a safe environment, lots of sleep and a balanced diet. It took months, but gradually she regained her physical and emotional strength. For the first time in eight years, she began to think for herself. One of her first decisions was to take legal action to rescue her oldest child from Rock's clutches.

Georgia Brown could barely contain her elation. At long last the CAS had an adult member who was willing to give evidence about Rock's treatment of the children. It was the breakthrough the social workers had been praying for.

Soon their feelings of relief gave way to horror and revulsion. Maryse confirmed for the social workers that Rock had divided the commune offspring into slave children and the chosen. She said he used the slave children, and sometimes his own, in sexual games that involved group masturbation. When he was drunk, he often hurled children into the lake or against a tree, calling them devils.



As the morning sun broke over the winter landscape, two OPP four-by-four trucks and a fleet of police snowmobiles roared across a field toward Rock's forest compound. It was Friday, December 6, 1985. Armed with a thick sheaf of warrants, Brown and nine of her colleagues, assisted by seven provincial police officers, were there to take custody of all thirteen children.

Rock appeared surprisingly sanguine about the raid. Surrounded by armed police, he knew it was pointless to resist. He decided that it would be better to offer the children up as a kind of sacrifice, in the hope that the authorities would then leave him

alone. One by one, he summoned his wives to his cabin so they could wash and dress their children. The women went about their appointed tasks as though it was an everyday event. Not one complained.

The operation lasted all day. To prevent mix-ups over the childrens' identities, CAS workers photographed each mother with her offspring and then made labels for the kids. They were then driven to Lindsay in a school bus, where foster families from the area were standing by to take them into their care.

"Before we left," Georgia Brown said, "we told the women that they could work with us to regain custody of their children. But one of the conditions we were adamant about was that they could not live as a group with Rock. None of them went for it. Not one." That included Gisèle, who gave birth to a baby boy two days after the raid and immediately gave him up. In a strange way, she felt relieved. Perhaps God would take pity on the children in their new homes.

Gabrielle, Solange and the other mothers reacted in a similar fashion. Since Rock had never allowed them to nurture their children, the natural bonds between parent and child were already severely weakened. In contrast, their own identities had become inseparable from Rock's. Forced to choose between the children and their master, they made the decision automatically.

On December 10, a provincial court judge placed all fourteen children in the temporary care of the Children's Aid Society until a full hearing could be conducted into the agency's application to make them permanent wards of the state. As required by law, he also directed the local Family Court assessment clinic to oversee an independent evaluation of

the children and the parents, with a view to recommending whether or not they should be reunited. It was, as the judge who presided over the Crown wardship hearing later noted, "the start of a long and sorry episode."



It was obvious from the moment the children arrived at their foster homes that something was terribly wrong. Several of the foster parents reported that the children seemed unusually passive and obedient, and showed indiscriminate affection toward strangers—another telltale sign of mistreatment. One school-age boy would jump whenever someone switched on a light. He ate potatoes and gravy with both hands and his teeth were yellow and black; cruel kids at school soon nicknamed him "Blackmouth." Another boy was "terrified of all bearded men." One of the baby girls displayed a variety of disturbing signs, including incessant "rocking, chanting and banging."

That was only the beginning. As the winter wore on, the foster parents heard chilling stories about life on the commune, most of which were subsequently confirmed by Maryse. One eight-year-old girl explained innocently how her daily workload at the commune had included washing the women's sanitary napkins by hand. Other children talked about sleep deprivation and how bells were constantly ringing in the middle of the night to wake them up. There were reports of bizarre rituals involving chanting and upside-down crosses. On his first night in his new home, one young boy lay awake at night for hours, screaming, "The devil's coming up from the ground."

According to Brown, "One child would talk in

one foster home about what happened, and then you'd find out other kids were saying the same things. It was very spontaneous and innocent, just like, *You know, that's how life was.*"

The children may have been innocent, but the harrowing tales they told were nearly enough to make the social workers throw up. One of the "slave" girls confided to the CAS staff that Rock would often hike to a private place in the bush, hang a lantern on a tall tree and then see the "chosen" children one by one to bestow his teachings upon them. He'd tell them that God lived under the ground—the proof was that that was where the flowers came from. The little girl also said that Moses had assigned her to raise a kid goat, feeding it with a baby's bottle. She was heartstruck when the commune leader then forced her to participate in a ritual sacrifice of the pet, one of many offerings Rock made to his deity. In those ceremonies, Moses would strip off his clothes and descend into a pit, smear himself with goat's blood and rise up before his entranced assembly in a kind of mock resurrection. (Although none of the parents corroborated that story, Gisèle later recalled returning to the commune one day to find goat's blood and entrails strewn across the kitchen floor. Rock said that he had slaughtered the animal, but refused to explain why.)

During another interview, Brown asked one of Rock's young daughters to describe some of the things she had seen at the Burnt River commune, using a couple of anatomically correct dolls. The girl looked puzzled. She apologized and said she wouldn't be able to tell the story—there weren't enough dolls in the room. Brown and a colleague scurried around the office grabbing every doll they could find, plus a few teddy bears for good measure.

The girl showed how the adults would all dance in a circle "with their pants off" around a fire. Next, the children would join in the dancing. Then a whole bunch of adults would lie naked on the ground, touching each other in funny ways.

After the kids were taken into care, a medical examination of another pre-adolescent girl showed that her genitalia had been torn.

In his reasons for judgment at the end of the Crown wardship trial, Judge Luçien Beaulieu recounted a litany of sordid acts.

Rock admitted to Georgia Brown that his "women" had sexual relations on the site, and that [two of the children] had observed them. He explained the genital organs with his wife Gisèle when they were all undressed in the kitchen. According to Georgia Brown, [a boy] told her that he saw [three of his half-sisters] playing with Rock Thériault's penis. They were pushing the skin of Rock's penis up and down. Georgia Brown describes a meeting with [one of the girls] on August 11, 1986, when [the girl] confirmed that she slept with "Papy" and that she liked being caressed but she didn't like his "stroking." Georgia Brown reports that during that interview of August 11, while [the girl] was playing with the sexually explicit dolls, she said: "Papy likes me to pull on his penis and make white stuff come out of it. Everybody is doing it, including Mom. Mom and me took turns and when white stuff came out, Papy would get up."

It is the Court's view that children of that age who live in isolated areas would not be in a position to even imagine such behavior. Maryse Grenier states that Rock had no

scruples about having one of the women masturbate Claude in front of group members until he ejaculated. Maryse adds that Rock masturbated Claude in the presence of the others, and that he organized naked wrestling matches among the women and between the women and Rock Jr.

Maryse elaborates on the children's activities. She says that Rock Jr. tried to penetrate [a five-year-old girl] in New Carlisle at Christmas, 1982, and that [the girl] told her he had hurt her. . . . This fact was confirmed by Rock Sr. Maryse states that [the same girl and another boy] were caught "playing doctors" in the closet. Maryse confirms having heard Rock refer to a certain incident at Burnt River in the presence of his wife and other women, saying that the children had had "fun" that morning watching his penis go up and down. On December 11, 1985, Rock said he believed that Rock Jr. had sexual relations with [one of the girls]. He also said he knew Rock Jr. had requested sexual favors from [two of his half-sisters]. He also states that he knows Rock Jr. committed acts of bestiality, and that he took him to a prostitute in Toronto to help him. . . .

Rock's views on the children's sex education were equally peculiar. He would have very young children masturbate him, claiming that the purpose of this was to awaken the children sexually. Following a letter from Gisèle, [one of the school-age girls] became, at one point, Rock's fiancée. Gisèle's explanation of this was that Rock was growing old and needed somebody to keep him warm at night. One

morning, Rock admitted that he had started [the same girl] masturbating him. He had also had Rock Jr. masturbate Claude, and one day Rock Jr. and [the girl] had sexual intercourse. Rock considered this normal.



It was hard to say what was more revolting—Rock's use of the children as sexual toys or his drunken, sadistic treatment of them. The commune leader's mood swings were extreme and unpredictable. He would laugh, cry or rant at the snap of a finger. One minute he would be cuddling two or three of his children in his arms in his homemade rocking chair, telling them stories about the animals; the next minute he would fly into a rage for no apparent reason.

Other than himself, no one was allowed to show the kids the slightest affection. Children were neither to be smiled upon nor comforted. And when they cried, Rock would order the other parents to beat them, or else do it himself. He once thrashed a three-day-old infant to stop him from wailing. According to Rock's theory of parenting, children had to complete their toilet-training within a month. If they failed, they would get a good spanking.

That was how Rock conducted himself on good days. On bad days, he committed acts of demonic cruelty. The children talked about being put in cages or being thrown against walls. On numerous occasions, Maryse told the court, he threw babies as young as two months into a nearby lake as punishment for crying. He would order the mother not to swim out and rescue her infant until "the little devil bobs up for the third time." "He said the children were disobedient and the devil had to be beaten out of them," Jacques Giguère recalled years

later. "He justified beating our kids because he said we were too spiritually weak to do it ourselves."

Once when Jacques tried to stop the brutality, Rock grabbed a wine goblet, smashed it against the edge of a table and used the jagged glass to slash Jacques' throat, severing the nerves in his neck. "His jugular vein was cut right open," said Gabrielle, who attended to the wounded man. "He could have died that night."

Rock loved to use the children as pawns to flaunt his absolute mastery over his pathetic, whimpering disciples. In the same way that he once tied Guy Veer to a branch and goaded his followers into rushing at him with knives, he would "crucify" kids by hanging them from a tree in the dense bush, with nails driven through their sleeves and pant legs. Then he would command the other adults to gather rocks and stone the child. Only at the last minute would he issue a reprieve.

To Georgia Brown, one incident in particular demonstrated the unspeakable depravity of Rock's messianic delusions. From Maryse and from the children, she heard about how he would sometimes hold two naked babies by their ankles upside down over a fire, roaring with laughter like some crazed god and saying, "I might just throw one of these babies into the flames. Which one will it be?" The mothers would be on their knees, tears streaming down their faces as they begged and pleaded for *their* child to be saved.

In his ruling, Judge Beaulieu recounted a number of violent incidents in the Gaspé.

> **Maryse Grenier says that when [Solange's son] Simon was about two and a half, Rock Sr. entrusted him to Rock Jr. because Simon was not in possession of all his faculties. She**

wasn't surprised that Simon didn't talk at two and a half, because the children were never spoken to. She states that when Simon was about seven months old, Rock had picked him up by the foot and she thought at the time that [Rock] had broken his leg. Consequently, Rock put splints on his leg for a while. Another way in which Rock punished Simon was to put him in the barrel used "to haul the fish." Rock also crushed his fingers to try and stop his bad habit of sucking his index and middle fingers. She also adds that Rock put his foot on Samuel's head saying: "The more you cry the more I'll crush your head." Then Rock threw him against the wall, causing his ear to swell.

Simon confirmed some of these facts to Georgia Brown. . . . Once, when Simon saw a police officer, he asked him to make an announcement on his police radio saying that [Rock] shouldn't hurt anybody. Simon confessed to Georgia Brown that he didn't like to see his father Claude Ouellette box with Rock Thériault because his father wasn't allowed to punch back. Simon says that he was hit on the back and in the stomach; he also had his head knocked against a "log" in the woods. . . .

As for Maryse, she tells how Jacques undressed Samuel two or three times when he was small, rolled him in the snow and rubbed his face with snow. He did that right from his birth, around January 1979, following Rock's advice, in order to discipline him. Maryse says that she actually would have preferred Guy to have looked after her children, rather than Rock. That says a lot. She says that once when she talked back to him because he had cut her

hair, Rock threatened her, saying he would "poke out Samuel's eyes. . . ."

It was all right for Rock to see a doctor in case of illness. However, he declared that for the other members, such a practice was against their religious beliefs. Maryse adds that at Christmas, 1984, he had drawn up a will with the following terms: When Rock died, Maryse should leave the group; if not, her husband Jacques should kill her. As for Gisèle, [he predicted] she would die in childbirth. And Gabrielle would be hanged from a tree. According to this will, only Claude Ouellette would receive any blessing. Maryse testifies that several of the women loved their children but were forced to renounce them in order to follow Moses, that is, Rock. In the same way, husbands and wives had to renounce each other. These broken bonds between husbands and wives, parents and children, children and extended family, certainly constitute one of the most harmful aspects of the whole situation and cannot be easily evaluated.



With all of the evidence the Children's Aid Society was compiling, Georgia Brown felt sure that the application for Crown wardship, allowing the foster families to adopt the children, would be an open-and-shut case. Early on, Rock himself had said he did not intend to contest the application because it would be "too expensive."

What the CAS hadn't bargained on were the findings of the court-ordered independent assessment. Incredibly, the team filed a three-hundred-page report strongly recommending that every one of the

children be returned to the Burnt River compound as soon as possible.

The assessment had been bungled from the start. Although the request for the evaluation was issued on December 10, 1985, it took the director of the Family Court assessment clinic until March to find a francophone who was willing to oversee the project. She gave the contract to Rhéal Huneault, the dean of social work at Sudbury's Cambrian College and the former director of a Children's Aid Society in Eastern Ontario. Huneault's job was to prepare a social history of the commune, based in part on records compiled by the social workers who had intervened in Quebec after the death of baby Samuel Giguère.

For the psychological evaluations of the children and the mothers, Huneault hired a bilingual professor from Sudbury's Laurentian University, Dr. Martine Miljkovitch. An expert in child abuse who received her doctorate in clinical psychology from the University of Paris in 1972, Miljkovitch knew Huneault because both were called in by the Sudbury CAS from time to time as consultants in cases involving francophone families.

Traveling to Lindsay for the assessment, Miljkovitch set herself up in a borrowed office in the CAS headquarters. There, in a matter of a few weeks, she interviewed all eight of the commune wives and Rock himself. She also performed psychological tests on eight commune children between the ages of three and nine, spending about three hours with each (the other children were deemed too young to be evaluated). Miljkovitch, at the time the director of psychology at Sudbury General Hospital, concluded that the six children fathered by Rock were healthy and normal. "I could

see the children were not disturbed and I work with children all the time," she told Ross Laver in June 1993. "They were beautiful children. The boys were not aggressive at all."

The other two children did seem to Miljkovitch mildly disturbed. Jacques' daughter, who was nine, had "problems with her identity and her sexuality, because she was not protected by her father." There was also evidence of physical abuse, but nothing to suggest that she had suffered chronic mistreatment. The other abnormal child was the boy born to Solange as a result of her brief "marriage" to Claude. "He was unruly and talked back to people. It was like a child in a divorce case. He hated Rock because Rock stole his mother from his father."

One of the problems, Miljkovitch concluded, was that the commune adults exposed their children to sex at an "unreasonably early age." Among other things, they were allowed to assist with childbirths, play with each other sexually and watch while adults made love and masturbated.

"It was an extremely liberal sense of sexuality," she said. "There was a kind of naïve attitude that you have to expose children to these things because they are part of nature. Certainly the children were permitted to have sexual activities among themselves, but the principles behind it weren't bad. Rock Thériault would also demonstrate how the penis worked by masturbating in front of the children. But he didn't do it for his own satisfaction; he did it as a form of education. I thought that was an important distinction."

In fact, in her written assessment and during eleven days of testimony at the wardship hearing in the fall of 1986, Miljkovitch praised Rock's pioneering spirit and applauded his courage and fortitude in

leading his group back to nature. By contrast, the government workers who had dealt with him since his arrival in the province were heartless and barbaric. Their constant meddling in the commune's affairs was nothing more than a campaign of harassment inspired by the authorities' refusal to tolerate a healthy, alternative lifestyle. According to Miljkovitch, the government's refusal to pay welfare benefits was a blatant attempt to break up the group. The decision had pushed the commune to the brink of starvation, which the authorities then used as a pretext to seize the children. "Being a psychologist, a woman, a mother and a human being," she wrote, "I can fully empathize with the parents' feelings and especially the mothers'. It is normal that society should at times question its members' behavior, but society should likewise question its own behavior, motivations and practices."

For the most part, Miljkovitch approved of the commune's lifestyle. Rock may have been sleeping with eight women, but at least he accorded each of them the status of wife. Countless so-called "respectable" men in society limited themselves to one marriage, but kept mistresses behind their wives' backs.

As for the allegations of serious child abuse, Miljkovitch dismissed them out of hand. To be sure, the commune leader did punish the children now and then. But it was the mothers who were mainly responsible for raising the children, she said; Moses merely dropped in on them now and then to amuse them. If there was a problem, it was primarily the government's fault. The best solution would be to return the children to the commune and assign a francophone psychologist or social worker to visit Rock's family on a regular basis. Acting as a liaison between the commune and the CAS, the official

would be responsible for educating the parents about child-care and ensuring the safety of the children.

Seven years later, Miljkovitch stands by her assessment. During her 1993 interview with Laver, she insisted that it was unfair of the CAS to intervene so forcefully. "I think Rock was drinking from time to time, but I don't think he was abusive to the point that the children should be taken away," said Miljkovitch, who is now chief psychologist for Sudbury's French-language public school board in addition to her professorship at Laurentian. "You have to understand that he was under so much stress. When you put people in that kind of situation, you should not be surprised to get some kind of abuse, alcoholism or whatever. I mean, they were starving. They were refused welfare benefits."



Miljkovitch was not the only one who objected to the way the authorities had handled the case. While she was conducting her assessment, the CAS was continuing its investigation into child abuse at the commune. To help with the interviews and to supervise group meetings between the children and their parents, the agency hired a French-speaking psychologist from Ottawa, Lisette Laroche.

Laroche soon concluded that Rock and his wives were being persecuted because they were francophones in an English-speaking environment. The psychologist also refused to believe, in spite of the mounting evidence, that the commune leader had subjected the children to any serious physical or sexual abuse.

Brown couldn't believe it. Moreover, she was deeply disturbed by the fact that Rock seemed to know as much about the progress of the investiga-

tion as people inside her own office. "I started really feeling uncomfortable, so I went to my supervisor and said I didn't want to work with Lisette any more. That got me labeled as a real troublemaker by the agency. *What's going on here? Why can't you get along with another worker?* It turned out that Lisette had been spending a lot of her own time with Rock and the group. And she was our employee!"

Brown's supervisor, Betty-Jean Moyle, shared her concerns, but couldn't help feeling sympathetic toward Laroche's situation. "She was sort of isolated," Moyle recalled. "She'd moved down here, they were a French-speaking group and there were a lot of cultural ties for Lisette. And let's face it, Rock can be very, very charming. I wouldn't like to say that she was vulnerable, but there were definite concerns that she was under Rock's charm. And she wasn't the only one who was being lured into the group. There was some concern about one of the adult daughters of a foster parent. You know, Rock has this ability of finding people who are bright and vulnerable—people who are trying to figure out where they're going in life and are looking for acceptance."



Had it not been for Miljkovitch's recommendation to return the children to the commune, the hearing on the Crown wardship application might have lasted only a few weeks. Instead, it continued for forty-five days over a period of eight months, with thirty witnesses and forty-five exhibits. Rock and his disciples showed up on the first day of testimony and then walked out. They fired their court-appointed lawyer and ignored repeated requests to return. The burly bushman who could drink for

days without sleep and toss his wives and children around like beanbags suddenly produced a doctor's letter requesting that he be excused from the trial because his heart could not take the stress.

It was just as well, because Judge Beaulieu had little time for Rock and his antics. His eighty-three-page ruling and reasons for judgement, dated October 26, 1987, painted the commune leader as a calculating dictator who had taken over the lives of his followers and controlled them like sheep. Concluding that there was a substantial risk that the children would be "sexually molested or exploited" if they were returned to their group, he ordered that they be made wards of the Crown, with no parental access. The one exception was Maryse's oldest daughter, Miriam. She was returned to her mother in Quebec on condition that the two accept any form of therapy or psychiatric care that might be recommended by the CAS.

The judge also had plenty of things to say about Huneault, Miljkovitch and Laroche—none of them flattering. "After having seen the way they handled themselves during cross-examination, the court finds their testimony to be unreliable," he wrote. On top of that, Miljkovitch and Huneault were unqualified to carry out the assessment. They had used none of the standard techniques for uncovering abuse, failed to interview the foster parents, performed no psychological assessment of the natural parents and made no attempt to ascertain how the parents related to the children. Their findings were "disconcerting, illogical and without any stated purpose."

Dripping with sarcasm, Beaulieu then trained his guns on the suggestion that government agencies had persecuted Rock and his disciples.

The Court finds it interesting to note that, according to [Miljkovitch], these people are merely victims of a society that does not understand them. Freedom of choice does not appear to have anything to do with their behavior both in Quebec and in Ontario. . . . The Court considers that if the Miljkovitch, Huneault and Laroche trinity is so distraught and upset over the fact that these people find themselves in an English environment, then one must wonder why they never examined, briefly or otherwise, the reason behind the flight of such a worthy group of Francophones from the French community and culture of Quebec, and their decision to settle in an English-speaking community that has the reputation of being probably one of the most thoroughly English in the province.

All three members of the assessment team went on at length about life in the country, and about the dedication, courage and initiative shown by Rock and his group in the bush. Obviously, there are several Canadians who are aware of and know people who have embarked on this kind of a life, one that represents a challenge. Moreover, our country was built to a large extent by such people. But the court must emphasize that the true pioneers, and those who followed in their footsteps and opted for the beautiful country life, as well as those who live that way nowadays, all these people managed to do so without abusing innocent children.

In sum, Judge Beaulieu said, the assessment team's submission was "one of the most deplorable reports the Court has ever seen."

Brown and her colleagues, who had worked on the case for three years, were euphoric about the outcome. The entire episode had been emotionally draining. Rock had fathered four more children since the 1985 raid, each of whom had been taken into custody within days of their birth. Still, they had the feeling that time was running out for Rock. They couldn't wait to see him hauled up on criminal charges. In August of 1986, Rock had even admitted abusing his wives and children to Georgia Brown in the presence of two officers at the Lindsay police station. The police had sat in on the social workers' interviews of the children and were equally eager to prosecute Rock.

But charges were never laid. Assistant Crown Attorney Alex Smith looked things over and said there wasn't enough evidence. The only adult witness was Maryse Grenier, an emotional basketcase who had no desire to confront her former master in court. Besides, the stories the children were telling were too outlandish and gruesome. Even if the jurors believed them, it might be unfair to the children to make them relive their experiences.

One OPP sergeant, Ron Deck, deflected attention from the case by telling a Toronto newspaper that there was nothing to support a criminal charge against Thériault. "Things aren't as bad as they've been made out to be," he said.

Regrettably, there was no way for the public to judge the truth of that statement. Local newspapers had completely ignored the case. The few reporters who had shown interest were prohibited by Ontario's Child and Family Services Act from publishing any information that might identify the

children or their parents, including Rock himself. To this day, court officials in Lindsay maintain a stony silence on Judge Beaulieu's reasons for judgement and refuse to release copies of it. Huneault himself has never been shown a copy.

Perhaps if the bureaucrats had not been so fastidious about keeping to themselves the dark truth of Rock's wilderness cult, the macabre events that were soon to unfold might have been prevented.

CHAPTER 15

OUR AMERICAN FRIENDS



The most important sect spawned by the Second Great Awakening was the brainchild of Joseph Smith. He was the son of a farmer who had settled in western New York State, in Ontario Country, and who claimed the ability to locate underground streams with a forked hazel switch. Young Joseph, an ambitious sort, decided that he could do one better than his father. While still in his teens, he began to advertise his services as a finder of buried money, crystals and enchanted stones that could be used to locate underground caverns. Directing his team of money-diggers with a wand at midnight under a full moon, Smith demanded absolute silence from his clients and the assembled spectators. When, as was usually the case, his crew turned up nothing, Smith would explain that just as they were about to reach the treasure, someone under the devil's influence had spoken and caused the bounty to disappear. In 1830, at the age of twenty-four, Smith published the *Book of Mormon,* which he claimed was a translation of a set of gold plates he'd dug up in the hills

near Palmyra, New York, in a spot revealed to him by the angel of God.

Smith claimed that the Garden of Eden was in Missouri, the cradle of human civilization and home of an emissary of God named Mormon who preached around the time of Christ. The Son of God himself had visited the American continent after his crucifixion, and would appear there again for the Second Coming. Smith soon gathered a large number of followers in an organization he named the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, and led them from New York to Missouri to establish the new Jerusalem. But during their long quest for sanctuary the young Mormon sect was ejected from town after town by suspicious outsiders. In 1843, Smith enshrined plural marriage as a sacred commandment of Mormonism. He pointed out that the Bible called upon Christians to "multiply and replenish the Earth," and that the old prophets had had many wives. A year later, Smith was shot and killed by a mob in Carthage, Illinois.

His successor, Brigham Young, eventually built a family with twenty-seven wives. But he is better remembered for leading twelve thousand Mormons on one of the largest group migrations in American history, across the western plains to a desolate valley near a large salt-water lake in present-day Utah. There, the Mormons founded a strict, hierarchical society which rejected the principle of individual liberty and forbade smoking tobacco and drinking alcohol. They named their capital Salt Lake City.

Although polygamy flourished in the Utah territory, it was a contentious issue in the established states to the east. In 1862, Congress outlawed plural marriage and in 1875, the U.S. Supreme Court denounced the practice as "odious." Anxious to gain statehood and join the American mainstream, the

Mormon leadership banned polygamy in 1890. But a minority of fundamentalist Mormons clung tenaciously to plural marriage, declaring it to be one of the most sacred tenets of the church. They went underground or moved to Mexico, Canada or neighboring western territories to avoid persecution at the hands of the Mormon establishment.

Two of the families that established bases in Mexico were the Allreds and the Le Barons. In the late 1930s, Rulon Allred, the leader of a large underground faction of polygamists, returned to Utah and established a successful practise as a naturopathic doctor. In one of the periodic raids carried out against polygamists in western states, police arrested Allred and forty-six other polygamists in 1944. Allred served seven months in prison, gaining his freedom with a promise neither to promote nor practice polygamy again. From then on he became extremely cautious and secretive. Over time he built a congregation of two thousand polygamists, who regarded him as a prophet. "There are more righteous women in the world than there are righteous men," he once told a reporter, justifying his chosen way of life. "And every righteous woman deserves a righteous man. Plural marriage has nothing to do with lustfulness and sensuality. It is a deeply spiritual matter." But behind his pious facade, some of Allred's acquaintances said that he harbored a dangerous fanataicism—claiming the right to take the life of anyone who veered from the path of righteousness.

Ervil Le Baron, another Mexican-born Mormon renegade, led a rival sect of polygamists known as the Church of the Lamb of God. He, too, declared himself a prophet with a God-given right to eliminate his enemies. He started in 1972 by ordering the murder of his own brother, Joel, who had kicked

him out of the Le Baron family fold two years earlier. He also masterminded the 1977 execution of Rulon Allred, whom he claimed was a false prophet, in Allred's office in Murray, a suburb of Salt Lake City. By the time of his own death in prison in 1981, the "Mormon Manson" had ordered more than a dozen deaths. He even left his followers a list of enemies, the "Book of New Covenants," as a blueprint for revenge. Of the fifty or so names on the list, about thirty are now dead. "There have been more murders since Ervil died than there ever was when he was alive," said Paul Forbes, a Utah police detective who investigated Allred's murder and is himself on Le Baron's hit list. The most notorious killings were in June 1988 in Texas, when Ervil's followers killed four people on the same day.

By some estimates, there are as many as thirty thousand practicing polygamists now living in Utah. Most are hardworking, orderly people who view themselves as modern martyrs, the truest of the true Mormons. But decades of persecution and ostracism by the official Mormon Church, which claims the loyalty of seventy per cent of Utah's 1.8 million residents, have bred in them a deep distrust of outsiders. Although "polygs" are to be found in all walks of life—as factory workers, lawyers, teachers, computer salesmen and so on—most keep a low profile, fearing that the Mormon establishment will blacklist them and ruin their ability to make a living.

One of the few "polygs" who has publicly crusaded for the right to take more than one wife is Roy Potter, a slim, cleancut man with the nerdy good looks of a Boy Scout. In 1980, at the age of twenty-six, Potter joined the police department in Murray as a patrolman, reporting to Paul Forbes. A Mormon in good standing, Potter soon won the

city's first-ever Employee of the Month award. But when Forbes received a tip in the fall of 1982 that Potter had two wives, Joann and Denise, he fired the young patrolman. Four months later the Mormon church excommunicated him. Unable to find other employment, Potter took a job as a janitor—and a third wife, Mary.

The same year, a defiant Potter filed a lawsuit in which he asked that Utah laws forbidding polygamy be overturned because they violated his constitutional right to freedom of religion. The case attracted national attention. But in 1984 a federal court judge ruled against him, and his appeal of that decision was unsuccessful. Finally, the U.S. Supreme Court refused to hear the case. By then the whole thing had become somewhat moot, since Potter's first two wives had left him.

During the time that his case was before the courts, Roy Potter received a letter from a man in Richelieu, Quebec, named Antonio Fuoco, who claimed to have a senior position in the Catholic church. Although it is illegal in Canada to have more than one wife, Fuoco said that he knew many polygamists and was fascinated by the practise. He told Potter that he wanted to educate the public about polygamy, and the two men began a regular correspondence.

Fuoco was also exchanging letters with Rock Thériault, having read Rock's book about his experiences in the Gaspé. Once, when Rock and Gisèle were visiting Fuoco's home, the host happened to mention Roy Potter. Rock had never heard of the fundamentalist Mormon tradition of polygamy. He picked up a phone one day in the late summer of 1987 and called Potter out of the blue, introducing

himself as a friend of Fuoco. "He didn't know that there were any people in the United States who felt the way he did about plural wives, so he was very anxious to talk to us," Potter recalled. "He said he was about to go on a holiday and he wanted to drop by for a brief visit."

The "brief visit" began on September 7 and lasted four days. Potter found it hard to understand Rock's spoken English, but liked him just the same. He took his visitor to a football game, a couple of Mormon museums and a conference of some two thousand members of the Allred faction, organized by Rulon's brother Owen. But the real highlight of Rock's stay in the Salt Lake City area was his introduction to one of Potter's Mormon friends, a well-known psychiatrist who divided his time between Utah and California, maintaining practises in both states.

Dr. Jess Groesbeck was a curious man, though undeniably bright. Born in Bellingham, Washington, in 1934, he attended high school in Seattle and then moved to Central America, where he was ordained a full-time Mormon minister and worked for a few years as a missionary in Guatemala, Nicaragua and Costa Rica. When he returned to Seattle he enrolled in the University of Washington, graduating with a Bachelor of Science in psychology in 1959 and a medical degree in 1963. After a three-year residency at a hospital in San Francisco, he trained as an analyst at the Carl Jung Institute in Zurich, Switzerland, from 1969 to 1971 and later at the C. G. Jung Institute of San Francisco for Analytical Psychology.

In 1971, Groesbeck opened his first office in Sacramento, an hour-and-a-half inland from San Francisco. His Utah practise, based in Provo, a short drive south of Salt Lake City, began in 1983. His

curriculum vitae states that Groesbeck specializes in long-term psychotherapy, "with special emphasis on altered states of consciousness, including dissociative states such as multiple personality." As a forensic psychiatrist, he has performed court-ordered evaluations of several serial murderers. His work since the mid-1980s has included testing and treating police officers and prison guards in California and teaching psychiatry and psychology at several institutions of higher learning, among them the University of California at Davis, the University of Utah in Salt Lake City, Brigham Young University in Provo and the C. G. Jung Institute in San Francisco. He is a fellow of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis and of the American Academy of Psychiatry and Law, a past president of the American Psychiatric Society of Jungian Analysts and an editorial board member of the *International Journal of Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy.*

His achievements in psychiatry were paralleled by a rapid rise in the Mormon hierarchy. By the mid-1980s Groesbeck had reached the rank of branch president—the equivalent of bishop—in Provo. It was there that he lived with his wife, Sharon, and five children, born between 1962 and 1967.

Groesbeck also nursed a couple of other passions. The first was for shamanism, which he has described as the "oldest form of healing in the world." Since 1974, he has published more than a dozen papers on the subject, and he is now writing a book tentatively titled *The Shaman: Archetype of the Healer.* During his research for the book, he interviewed modern-day shamans in Ecuador, Peru, New Mexico, Arizona and British Columbia. His favorite hobbies include meditation and collecting American Indian drums and other artifacts.

Jess Groesbeck's other interest is polygamy. His great-grandfather, Nicholas Harman Groesbeck, is buried in Springville, just south of Provo, with his two wives. Occasionally, Groesbeck would take visitors to see their graves, where he would speak about the profound connection he felt to his polygamous ancestors. In addition, Groesbeck's own wife, who died in 1992, was the sister-in-law of a well-known polygamist, Ogden Kraut.

When Roy Potter lost his job for his beliefs, Groesbeck befriended him, offered moral support and even hired Potter's wife Mary as a part-time typist. "He leans very heavily to the early Mormon concepts like polygamy, which the present-day Church does not embrace," Potter said of his friend. "But at the same time he recognizes that the Church is a very powerful institution, and if you get on the wrong side of it, bad things can happen. There's immense pressure on him to deny his real religious orientation—and after all, he has a great deal to lose."

Even so, Groesbeck rarely passed up the opportunity to meet practicing polygamists. He was especially interested when Potter told him about the French-Canadian who was staying at his house in September 1987. Not only was Rock Thériault a rare example of a non-Mormon polygamist, he also claimed to be a self-taught healer. To Groesbeck, he sounded like a living example of the two traditions closest to his heart.

Potter arranged for the two men to meet one night at Ogden Kraut's house. All evening, Groesbeck listened with rapt attention as Rock described his heroic struggle to establish a spiritual sanctuary deep in the backwoods of Ontario, surrounded by wild animals, natural springs, and trees and plants of all description. He and his eight wonderful wives

lived off nature, chopping down trees for firewood, smoking their own fish, growing vegetables and tapping maple trees for syrup. They were so far from civilization and conventional doctors that Rock had been forced to develop his own home remedies, using a variety of herbs and mosses, spruce gum and tree bark.

The other thing Rock talked about that night was how the government in Canada was always persecuting him. He told Groesbeck and Potter about the time the Quebec authorities had run him out of the province and burned his first commune to the ground. Worse still, the government had seized all eighteen of the children he had fathered since taking up polygamy.

Groesbeck was both touched and impressed. When Rock mentioned that he was welcome to visit the Burnt River commune any time he wished, Groesbeck happily accepted and promised to look for an opening in his busy schedule.

The two men got on like a house on fire. But while Rock was obviously taken with Groesbeck's professional credentials, deep down he was a bit disappointed by Roy Potter. Here was a man who had become famous—even to the point of appearing on the Phil Donahue show—as a promoter of polygamy, and yet at home he kept only one wife. Rock kept giving Potter sly digs, claiming that his own eight wives would rush up to him the moment he stepped off the plane and commiserating that Roy had to make do with just Mary—fine though she was. Even Ogden Kraut, who'd written books and organized conferences on the subject, had only three wives. "He made a lot of comparisons between our lifestyle and his, and how his was much better," Mary Potter recalled. "Rock painted a picture of his wives as the most beautiful women in the world.

Actually, he made me jealous. He came to learn from us, but we ended up learning from him."

Once, when he was feeling especially boastful, Rock challenged Potter to name any living person who had as many wives as he did. In fact, Potter did know of one, an excommunicated Mormon who lived in the southern Utah town of Big Water. Heck, that guy had *nine* wives. Rock decided to visit him straight away.



If you called central casting and asked them to send over an outlaw character, he'd probably look and sound a lot like Alex Joseph. A proud, fiercely independent man with a gravelly voice, scruffy grey beard and the squinty eyes of a gunslinger, Joseph is as rugged and weather-beaten as the rocky desert landscape that surrounds his home. He bears a faint resemblance to Kris Kristoffersen or Clint Eastwood —both of whom Joseph would probably dismiss as limp-wristed city boys.

In fact, Joseph was once a city boy himself. The grandson of a Greek immigrant, he was born in 1936 and grew up on Paradise Boulevard in Modesto, California, the setting for the drag races in George Lucas' movie *American Graffiti.* When he was ten his father died; thereafter he was raised by his mother and an uncle. His romance with guns started early, and at sixteen he dropped out of high school to enlist in the marines. During his twenties he joined the Modesto police force, got married and started a family—"real mainstream, with one boy and two girls." On Sundays they attended services at the local Greek Orthodox Church.

But Joseph soon rebelled against convention. After studying the Bible, he converted to Mormonism. Soon his views became too fundamentalist for the

Church, which kicked him out for espousing polygamy. Then, at thirty-three, he took a second wife, Diana, and hooked up with the Allred faction, moving to the clan's base in Hamilton, Montana. Four months later he wed again, this time to one of Rulon Allred's step-daughters, Margaret. Despite the family ties, he eventually broke with the Allred group because he refused to accept his new father-in-law as the source of all wisdom.

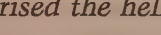
Although Joseph's first wife left him around that time, he had no trouble finding additional women to share his bed.

When I first got into this thing, I thought the most difficult part would be to find a woman who would do it. Hell, that was the easy part. The minute I made it known that I was available to this lifestyle, I got more marriage proposals than I could possibly accept. It wasn't a case of going out dancing and chasing women.

What I'm trying to do can be summed up in one sentence. You want to understand the Old Testament, then live the Old Testament lifestyle. Here's how I did it. My first wife meets a girl named Margaret, and tells Diane about it. She was twenty, and in that community when you're twenty you're an old maid. She had rejected the notion of plural marriage, but apparently when she met me she wanted me to be her husband. She had that feeling, I didn't. So within six months, I've got three wives. I learned something real quick. Women have something else completely different in their minds than men think they got—although what it is, I don't know.

Then in Montana I got a job teaching

school. A girl named Pamela comes up to me and says, "I hear you have more than one wife and I want to marry you." I said, "You're crazier than hell. You're seventeen. If we did that, we'd both be in big trouble." Finally, I go to her and say, "Hey, if you want to marry me, let's do it when you're eighteen." So here's this Catholic girl who didn't have any trouble with the idea of plural marriage. Well, the school board fired me, confiscated my house and threatened to put me in jail. That was a favor, really. It was a lousy house, lousy job, lousy state. So I got the hell out of there. Just before I left I met this co-ed at a party for my students—that's Joanna. She insisted that I go rescue two girlfriends of hers from their do-nothing misery, and that was Boudicca and Elizabeth. So I married those three girls like bang, bang, bang. It's okay if you're surprised, because it surprised the hell out of me.



In 1978, after a brief stay in California, Alex and his wives paid eighteen thousand dollars for a good chunk of Glen Canyon, a dying government construction town in southern Utah. He renamed it Big Water. Although the town itself is a motley collection of dusty roads, trailers and prefab bungalows, it is set amid some of the most inspiring geographic formations in North America. Surreal towers of red sandstone loom over the desert floor, with its yellow sand and clumps of grey-green sagebrush. Zigzagging across the raw landscape is Lake Powell, a 320-kilometer-long bulge in the Colorado River surrounded by majestic stone cliffs and petrified sand dunes.

For Joseph, Big Water offered a refuge from gov-

ernment and a gathering place for fellow polygamists. "I figured I had the constitutional right to set up a monarchy in southern Utah," he says in a cowboy drawl. That monarchy was to be guided by Biblical principles—as interpreted by Joseph himself. Obsessed with genealogy, he has traced his own lineage back to Jesus Christ. He also developed an interest in archeology. In 1980, he held a press conference in Salt Lake City to announce a discovery he claimed made the Rosetta Stone looked like "childish nonsense." Working from a facsimile of a burial head plate found in the Egyptian pyramids, he had worked out a mathematical formula proving a link between the writings of Moses and Joseph Smith. When he applied that formula to the hieroglyphics, he said, he discovered information on astronomy, on Jesus Christ, and on connections between the Egyptians, Hebrews and American pioneers—so much knowledge "the *Encyclopedia Britannica* can be rewritten."

When he wasn't conducting his research, Joseph was building his family. He married his ninth and most recent wife, Dawn, in 1988, when she was eighteen and he was fifty-two. At that point, the couple had been engaged for nine years.

Today, Joseph has twenty-one children, several of whom are adopted. A gun nut, he lives in a modest second-floor apartment bristling with loaded pistols and rifles. Downstairs is a large meeting hall where he and his two hundred or so followers hold religious ceremonies, the most important of which mark the spring and fall equinoxes. Many of those supporters are just as eccentric as Joseph himself. Joe Schadl, for example, a retired missile technician for Hughes Aircraft, claims to have irrefutable proof that Franklin Delano Roosevelt was assassinated.

By comparison, Joseph's wives live sedately. The

nine women inhabit a U-shaped complex of houses and apartments with a total of eight kitchens, nineteen bedrooms and ten living rooms. Most of them have their own jobs, and raise their own children. When one wife wishes to sleep with her husband, she reserves a night on Joseph's crowded calendar. "We basically use an appointment system," explains Elizabeth, now a lawyer. "If I want to spend Friday evening at his house, I make an appointment. If he's already booked, I request another night, or if my schedule is inflexible I talk to the other wife and we work out an arrangement."



On September 11, 1987, Rock pulled up to Alex Joseph's compound in a pickup he had borrowed from Roy Potter. Joseph and several supporters were busy installing a backstop at the local baseball diamond, and at first, Joseph didn't have much time for the stranger. His mood changed, however, after one of his sons and another boy showed up with bad burns, the result of an accident at the town dump. Rock immediately grabbed his black medical bag and applied an ointment to the wounds. Joseph was grateful and invited the Canadian to stay.

Rock introduced himself as a doctor and a prophet. Neither claim surprised Joseph much. "I realized he was nuts, but this state is full of kooks," he said later.

In Rock's case, two things in particular stood out. He seemed to be an incorrigible showoff. After dinner on the first day, Elizabeth dropped by to see Alex and Rock, who were sitting in her office. As she stuck her head in the door, Rock began boasting about how much money he had. Without a blink, he pulled down his pants and fished a wallet out of his leopard-skin bikini underwear. "Here, keep this for

me," he said, throwing the wallet on the desk. "There's three thousand dollars in there." Alex, who believed in minding his own business, declined to have anything to do with the money. Elizabeth got the impression that Rock was trying to expose himself, and took an immediate dislike to him.

Elizabeth's hunch wasn't far off. Back in Salt Lake City, Potter had confided in Rock that Alex Joseph, while an accomplished polygamist, was having trouble getting three of his wives pregnant. After dinner on the first night, Rock kept trying to show up the famous patriarch by casually launching into an explicit description of sexual practises Alex could use to fertilize his women. "It was none of his business," Joseph recalled. "We'd only met the guy three hours earlier, and he says, 'Well, tonight I'll be in your bedroom and show you how to do it.' It was bar-room talk, and I didn't like it in my house."

Thankfully, Rock's behavior during the rest of the visit was more acceptable. He and Alex swapped stories about their encounters with the authorities, and Rock once again bemoaned the loss of his children to the government social workers. Speaking as one polygamist to another, he also talked about the jealousies that divided his wives, and asked Alex if he had any pointers that might help to smooth relations in his family.

That was Alex's cue. He told Rock that if he wanted help, he would have to give him several hours of undivided attention. When Rock nodded in agreement, Alex commenced a detailed description of his religious program. The first phase involved a baptismal ceremony in Lake Powell during which the initiate had to promise to live according to the teachings of Jesus Christ—who, according to Alex, had several wives. Once a person joined Alex's community he was encouraged to design and fly a flag as

a symbol of his ancestral clan. There were several dozen such flags in the Big Water meeting hall; Alex's own standard had pale blue and white stripes and an elaborate coat of arms with a key, a branch, a candelabrum and a white buffalo.

But those two exercises were only the beginning. To be worthy of many wives, a man had to live righteously and care for his family with honesty and patience.

When Alex found out that Rock had officially married only one of his wives, he urged him to formalize his commitment to the others. This could be done with a standard marriage contract that Alex had drawn up and used in hundreds of ceremonies. Unlike most marriages, which ended as soon as one of the parties died, Alex's contracts lasted for all eternity. Indeed, they could even be used to marry dead ancestors to each other, replacing the marital bonds between couples that had dissolved when they passed away. "It's a matter of getting your family organized," Alex explained. "We do these marriages between dead people as a regular thing. Once we draw up a family tree, we'll do these marriages for all of them." Alex himself had performed marriage ceremonies for every single one of his direct ancestors going back nine hundred years to the time of William the Conqueror.

Once your family was in order, you were eligible to take on the responsibility of the highest office in Alex's religious program. You were ready to be ordained a king. Only a select handful had ever made it that far up the spiritual ladder.

Rock was deeply impressed by Alex's teachings. Driving to Salt Lake City at the end of his five-day stay in Big Water to catch a plane back to Toronto, his head was buzzing with new ideas.

CHAPTER 16

WRATH OF GOD



In a way, the children were the last link between Thériault's commune and society. When they lost them they all became very depressed. I remember saying at the time that it was going to end in catastrophe. When I heard what happened later, I wasn't surprised.

—Martine Miljkovitch

During the twenty-two-month legal battle over the commune children, a lot of people said a lot of nasty things about Martine Miljkovitch. But when it came to predicting the impact of the children's removal on Rock's tortured psyche, she was right on the money.

The bearded commune leader who had impressed locals with his high-minded talk about God and natural living was rapidly becoming a public menace.

One of the most talked-about incidents had taken place three months before his Utah excursion, in the early hours of Saturday, June 6, 1987. At about 2 a.m. police reinforcements were called to a local watering hole, the Victoria County Feed Company. According to the dispatcher, the cops at the scene were having trouble with "four Charles Manson types that won't let anyone out of the bar."

The "Charles Manson types" turned out to be

Rock, Jacques, Claude and Solange. They'd come to pick a fight with the owner of the tavern, Jay Lapatina. A couple of weeks earlier, Lapatina had hired three of Rock's women to clean the bar after closing each night. He promised to pay them in cash at the end of their shifts. But when Lapatina wasn't around to settle up, Rock took matters into his own hands. He blocked the tavern exit, refusing to let patrons out until he got his money.

It didn't take long for the cops to quell the situation. They hustled the four troublemakers into their red Datsun pickup and ordered Rock to drive straight home. Just to make sure, Constables Malcolm Quigley and Jeff Simpkins tailed the truck to the outskirts of town—where it suddenly pulled a U-turn and made a beeline for Lapatina's house on Grove Road. Quigley pursued the vehicle and radioed for backup.

At Lapatina's place, Rock jumped out and headed for the front door, armed with a buck knife. Quigley and Simpkins got caught up in a tussle in the driveway with Jacques and Claude, while two other cops ran into the house. Inside, Rock dove to the floor and wrapped his arms around the leg of a pool table, refusing to let go.

A few whacks from a police nightstick took care of that problem.

The cops finally dragged Rock out to the lawn in handcuffs, where he collapsed and began to cough and choke theatrically, shouting, "My heart, my heart." Jacques lunged at the cops with fists flying. Solange and the other two women crowded around, pushing and shouting.

"There's the one that hit me," Rock yelled.

According to police notes, Solange called one officer "a dog" and another "a cold-hearted son of a

bitch." She spat in the face of the one Rock had pointed out.

As soon as the cops slapped the handcuffs on Solange, she softened up. "I'm sorry," she whimpered.

Meantime, an ambulance crew had arrived to check Rock's condition. His heart rate was eighty-eight and strong, but when the medics tried to check his blood pressure the brawny forty-year-old kept flexing his arm, making it impossible. By now six cops were at the scene, struggling to get Rock into the back seat of a cruiser while he shouted and screamed that he couldn't walk and had lost all feeling in his legs. Finally they headed off toward Lindsay, with Rock insulting the cops in French and English and complaining that he was having a heart attack.

Realizing that wasn't getting him anywhere, Rock opted for a less subtle approach. "I'm going to shit my pants, you bastards," he shrieked.

In the flat-footed prose of the police blotter, Thériault "was advised against doing this, but did so anyway." The cops grimaced and frantically rolled down the windows.

Back at the Lapatinas', four other constables were hustling the commune women out of the house. The bar owner's wife, trying to make the best of it, shouted after them: "Call me tomorrow."

"What?" Lapatina erupted. "Are you crazy? They're not coming back here ever again."

When the cops reached the hospital, they had the unenviable task of carrying the foul-smelling messiah to a wheelchair and rolling him into emergency. The attending doctor examined the patient as fast as he could and pronounced him healthy. Rock spent the rest of the night in the Lindsay jail, charged with trespassing and resisting arrest. He later pled guilty to mischief and received a seventy-

five-dollar fine and six months' probation. The judge ordered him to abstain from alcohol and stay out of Fenelon Falls.



About a month later, Rock began phoning one of the foster families, pumping them for information about the girl they'd taken in. Like Robert De Niro's character in *Cape Fear,* he gradually struck up a friendship with the parents' twenty-one-year-old daughter, a cute and impressionable nursing student. She reminded Rock of the way Chantal was when he first met her, shy and vulnerable. "At first he seemed really nice," Virginia McIntyre later told the police. "Then he started trying to talk me into leaving home and joining his commune. He said my parents were evil."

Before long, three of Rock's wives were doing the same thing. They were constantly phoning Virginia, approaching her on the street and dropping in to see her at school. They kept repeating how true happiness could only be found through Moses.

Virginia was confused. Rock and the women were friendly enough, but something didn't seem right. Politely, she turned aside their overtures. When that didn't work, she pleaded with them to leave her alone.

Two weeks after classes started that fall, Virginia strolled into the cafeteria for a coffee. Suddenly a hairy arm reached out and grabbed her by the shoulder. Rock had been waiting for her. "This is a wicked place, and you've been a bad girl," he snarled. "If you don't quit school and come with us, you'll be sorry." Virginia wriggled out of his grasp and ran home. Her parents called the police, but she begged them not to lay charges.

The calls kept coming, sometimes at two or three

in the morning. The McIntyres' lawyer sent a letter telling Rock to cut it out, but it only seemed to make things worse. On a Monday night in early November, a man with a thick French accent phoned her and identified himself as "Bill."

"He said he didn't want any more contact with the lawyer or police," Virginia told the cops, "or me and my mother would be meeting the Angel of Death sooner than we might think."

The harassment continued, so Virginia went to the police in December and applied for a peace bond to prevent Thériault and his followers from having any contact with her. A week after New Year's, she got a phone call from a man with a different French voice. He said his name was Fred. "Stop the peace bond," he said, "or you'll be signing your own death certificate."

By now, Virginia was certain that her life was in danger. She begged the Crown attorney to drop the matter, but he was determined to go ahead.

In late March, a week before the case went to court, Virginia was sitting in a college lounge when the pay phone on the wall started ringing. She answered it and recognized Rock's voice immediately. "You'd better tell the Crown you've been lying about everything, or else leave town by Wednesday," he said.

On April 6 the police arrested Rock for obstructing justice. Virginia never heard from Rock again.



There was a guest at the commune in mid-May. Dr. Groesbeck, the illustrious psychiatrist from Utah, flew up to Toronto, rented a car and drove to Burnt River, arriving on a Friday.

Rock was proud as a peacock to be playing host to

such an eminent scholar. He told everyone to get dressed up for a welcoming ceremony. Jacques, wearing an ill-fitting jacket and tie, stood at the door holding Rock's latest creation, a commune flag inspired by Alex Joseph's collection of family banners. It had vertical red, yellow and blue stripes, a half-moon and a crude rendition of a bear mauling a bee-hive. It looked like something a moderately bright bunch of kindergarten kids would dream up. Groesbeck pronounced it "wonderful."

The next night, Rock threw a party for the doctor. He wanted to show Groesbeck how important he was, so he invited a prominent local couple over to join them for drinks. Murray Robinson was a justice of the peace; he and his wife, Margaret, also owned some rental cottages in the area and, a couple of years earlier, had hired several of the commune members to do odd jobs. Rock introduced Robinson as "my good friend the judge."

According to Margaret Robinson, the Utah doctor "kept saying that he was going to write a book about Rock's life, the commune and the polygamy and all that. He seemed fascinated by it."

But the Robinsons didn't stay at the property for long. They knew all about Rock's recent skirmishes with the law and figured it might look bad to hang around.

As for Groesbeck, he spent most of his time lauding Rock's achievements and dreaming up grandiose schemes for a psychiatric clinic on the property. He talked about closing his two practices in the States and moving in with his new friends. Rock's head was spinning. He had visions of himself as the director of a world-famous mental institution. It would sure beat flogging maple syrup. Dollar signs in his eyes, he laid on the VIP treatment, in-

structing his wives to give Groesbeck massages and wait on him hand and foot.

Groesbeck left after four days. On June 1, he sent a thank you letter to the commune.

> Dear Rock,
>
> It has been one week since I have visited with you and I am still reflecting over that remarkable visit. I cannot tell you how much deep appreciation I have for your generosity, kindness and hospitality. . .
>
> More than that, the deep sense of spiritual comradeship and friendship is all the greater and I must say that you have profoundly affected my life.
>
> . . . Here in downtown Sacramento, where my office is, running into the things that people do here made the city even more irrelevant as I considered life for you in the woods. I said to myself, "If I had to live here permanently, I would definitely sell everything and move to join your group as a humble worker, or in any capacity that I could." Life in the woods would be much richer and more noble than any of the craziness and madness that exists in the city.
>
> There are some redeeming things here, such as my work. . . . I do feel that I am in contact with nature when I do touch the soul of man, much like you do when you feel that you are in touch with animals, the forest and the trees.
>
> What is very strange is that last week I had my wallet stolen in a supermarket in downtown Sacramento. That was such a disturbing experience, one again that reminded me of the contrast between here and the wilderness. . . .



All that summer, Rock was in and out of court on the charge of obstructing justice. Most people in trouble with the law would at least try to keep their noses clean, but Rock wasn't like most people. His latest target was a neighbor, Jean-Marc Martin. A canoe-builder who dressed like a lumberjack and taught French on the side, Martin had a salt-and-pepper beard and eyes that narrowed to slits when he smiled.

Martin had known Rock since 1984, when he had loaned the group one thousand dollars to help them get through their first Ontario winter. In a rare display of accountability, Rock actually repaid the money. Martin later gave the pioneer leader sleeping bags, a butter churn, a cream separator and other items. Rock returned the favors by sending over smoked fish and firewood.

In August 1988, Rock left on a trip to Paris, hoping to find someone who would publish his autobiography. His scheme fizzled, so he boarded a train and spent two weeks touring France from north to south. On his return to Burnt River, he pulled up to Martin's place in the commune's broken-down army jeep, accompanied by Gabrielle and Jacques. He was bearing a gift from overseas—a bottle of duty-free Grand Marnier.

My girlfriend was there, and I brought out five glasses so we could all have a drink. One shot led to another. Everybody was in a festive mood, but later I became upset with Gabrielle for not telling me that Rock had a problem with liquor. It didn't take long for the Grand Marnier to disappear, so Rock asked Jacques to go out to the jeep and bring

in two cases of beer. We were talking and at one point my girlfriend complained about her back. I forget the exact details but Rock tried to do some kind of chiropractic treatment on her. She was on her stomach, and the treatment was hurting her. Jacques was holding her down and Gabrielle was assisting in some way. It stopped, but I could see that Thériault was losing control of himself—crying and carrying on.

I got scared so I sent my girl home. I guess Thériault got upset with me for that. He grabbed me and shook his fist in my face. Jacques pleaded with him not to do anything to me. We went outside and it was dark. Thériault was yelling and making sounds like an animal. He took hold of my wrist and tried to pull me into his jeep. We struggled a bit, back and forth, and I managed to free myself. He said he wanted to take me to see Solange. I gather she was sick. Why would he want me to visit her? He asked Jacques and Gabrielle to help him drag me into the jeep, but I ran off into the bush. I could hear all this noise going on, and Thériault shrieking in French. I found out later he was ramming my Lada over and over, which I'd put up on blocks. He rammed it so hard it fell off.

When I came out of the bush, I met Gabrielle and Jacques. They had also hid out in the woods. They were frightened and stayed the night in my workshop. When I gave them a ride home the next morning we found the jeep down the road, abandoned in a ditch. Jacques and Claude came back later to get it. They helped me put the wrecked Lada back on blocks. Claude told me that Rock was

sorry for what happened, and would buy me a new car. I'd had enough of Thériault and never wanted to see him again.



The havoc Rock was wreaking outside of the commune was child's play compared with the terror he was bringing down upon his disciples.

The senseless violence had been building for a decade. When Rock was drunk, his followers would only have to look at him the wrong way to incur his anger. Moses would march off to his sanctuary to consult his god, the deity he liked to call the Master of Life and Death, the Good and Bad Creator.

By the time he returned, there'd be madness in his eyes. He'd rage about his disloyal and wicked subjects, and about how death for non-believers was always cruel and terrible. Satan and his army of demon bitches would roast them over an open pit. The worms would crawl up from Hell and make a delicacy of their precious flesh.

"Do you think I can argue with the Master?" he would rail at them. "If anyone dares to question Moses and his decisions, it is the same as defying God. You cannot escape the wrath of the Father."

Solange, Jacques and the others cowered before their leader, convinced that he could snuff out their lives at any moment he chose. Years of mental and physical torture had trained them not to think, not to question. They felt Rock could see inside their minds at all times. Sometimes when they looked at him they were sure they could see swirls of light dancing about his head.

According to Claude, it took only four or five bottles of beer before Rock became violent and started doing terrible things. The drinking binges would last two or three days, during which Rock would

down a total of at least forty-eight beers. "The first night he would be up all night," Claude recalled. "He would punish us if we fell asleep. He would usually pass out by the second night. If he didn't start drinking the next morning everything would be all right. But if he took any more alcohol, the violence started all over again."

The resulting atrocities would have made the Marquis de Sade wince.

Once, Rock knocked back a twenty-six-ouncer of cognac. For reasons no one seems to remember, he blew up at Claude and decided to punish him by wrapping an elastic band tightly around his testicles. Obediently, Claude kept it on until the following morning. By then, his scrotum had swollen up to the size of an orange and turned various shades of blue and purple.

It was a month later, while urinating, that Claude looked down and noticed that one of his testicles was infected.

"It felt dead," said Claude. "I ran away and hid in a cold fridge, but Rock was drinking again and he decided to do one of his operations. He was drunk and started searching for me. Then I ran into a small outhouse, but Rock took the jeep and began ramming it over and over again until I came out."

Moses commanded Boaz to lie on the ground, while the other disciples grabbed hold of his arms and legs. Using a razor blade, the commune leader sliced open Claude's scrotum and plucked out the infected testicle with his fingers. Then he cauterized the incision with a piece of red hot iron.

"There was blood all over the place," Claude said. "It was so painful to walk after that."

But Rock wasn't finished. As soon as the operation ended and Claude's screams had died down, he held a vote on whether to stone Claude for offend-

ing the Supreme Master. Mercifully, the motion was defeated. Then Rock grabbed an acetylene welding torch and announced that he was going to use it to look inside Claude's stomach. In the commotion, Claude somehow managed to pull himself to his feet. Blood dripping down his leg, he staggered off into the forest to hide until Moses sobered up.



As the attacks became more frequent, it was not unusual for Claude, Gabrielle or others who were targets of Rock's wrath to flee the commune. Often, they hid out in the bush for a couple of days without food or shelter. Some of the wives hitchhiked to a women's shelter in Fenelon Falls or Peterborough, fifty kilometers southeast of Burnt River. "I remember that one time, a woman came here because she was running away from the commune," said a volunteer worker who spent several months at a Peterborough shelter in 1987. "She was hurt bad and you could see she was scared. But she wouldn't say how it happened. I got the feeling she was protecting someone. She said that her home was not a nice place."

Gisèle ran away most often. She spent so much time hiding in the bush, shivering and shaking like a wounded rabbit, that she began to keep a stash of blankets in a secluded spot. She grew to hate winter, because the thin woollen covers did little to protect her from the howling wind and driving snow on the worst days of central Ontario's four-month-long deep freeze. When Rock was at his worst, she would beg or borrow money to take the bus to Quebec, where she could seek refuge with her parents. After a few days or a week, Rock would phone the house and make arrangements to pick her up and bring her back to the commune—her "real family."

For the next few weeks, Rock would be on his best behavior.

Some time later Rock would begin drinking again, and Gisèle would know to expect her punishment.

One of those times, in February 1987, Rock whipped a hunting knife across the room. The blade pierced Gisèle's thigh to a depth of three inches. As the knife flopped on to the floor and blood gushed from her leg, Rock went to the cupboard to get another beer. He said the wound would teach her a lesson for running away and dishonoring her husband. Then he went to bed.

Jacques tried to stop the bleeding by tying a towel around Gisèle's leg. A massive blood clot formed and her thigh swelled up to the size of a football. It felt to Gisèle as though her leg was broken.

Two hours later, Rock woke up. He was still very drunk. He peered at the injury with bloodshot eyes and decided to treat it.

When he did his doctor's work he was just like a butcher. He was very rough with his patients. He took my leg and bent it, forcing the blood to shoot out from the cut. The pain was unbearable. Then he asked someone to get a file, similar to a large nail, and put it in the fire so it would get red hot. Everybody was holding me down. He stuck the file into my leg and I was screaming—I was trying to fight the others off. But Rock still wasn't satisfied. He boiled water for twenty minutes and asked Gabrielle to pour it on to the cut. She was shaking and she wound up spilling three cups of boiling water on my leg. The pain was so intense that I couldn't stop screaming. I passed out twice. When I came to, I couldn't

recognize the people around me. It was as if I was in a concentration camp.



After Rock went back to bed, Gisèle begged Jacques to take her to a hospital by snowmobile. But Jacques refused because he was afraid that the roar of the motor would wake up Rock. All Gisèle could do was pray that her leg would heal so she could walk again.

Instead, the leg swelled up again with infection, so several weeks after the knife attack Rock decided to administer another painful treatment. He mixed salt with olive oil and spent two hours massaging the concoction into the wound with his fingers. Then he smeared spruce gum over the open sore and put a bandage on it.

Gisèle limped around for a month, practicing walking so that she could escape again. By then spring was approaching and the maple sap had begun to run. She fought the pain and worked hard with the others tapping the trees and carrying buckets of sap so that Rock wouldn't accuse her of slacking off. One day, when Rock had gone to Toronto to buy supplies, she hobbled to the road on her cane. The others called after her, asking her to come back. But she knew that if she returned, one of them would be certain to tell Rock of her attempted escape. Instead, she hitched a ride to one of the local women's shelters. She thought about going to the hospital, but was terrified that the doctors would ask how she got the injury.

"After a few days I went back," Gisèle said. "I always went back because in my head I had to stay with my husband. The others in the group needed me, too."

One summer evening in 1987, while Raoul Boilard was puttering around outside his home in Lyster, Quebec, a battered old van pulled up to the door. Out stepped his daughter Solange, Rock Thériault and the seven other commune wives. Rock explained that the group was on holidays and had left Jacques and Claude behind in Ontario to hold the fort.

Mr. Boilard wearily welcomed the troupe into his home, where they spent several days eating the cupboards bare. Raoul and his wife were happy to have Solange back at home, along with her girlfriends. They could scarcely stand the sight of Thériault, but they were afraid that if they said anything at all against him, Solange would walk straight out the door.

The Boilard house had three extra bedrooms. Rock took the back room for himself, while his wives crowded into the other two or crashed on the sofa. Raoul barely slept that night. In the early hours of the morning, he got up to have a look around and found one of the girls slumped on the floor near the front door. He couldn't tell if she was sleeping or keeping watch in case one of the other families came to remove their daughter by force.

In the morning, all the girls filed past Rock's bed to give him a wake-up kiss.

During the next few days, the group dropped in to see Francine Laflamme's parents. Then they paid a visit to Thetford Mines because Rock wanted to see his mother and flaunt his eight wives in front of his father. When they arrived, Rock had to plead with Hyacinthe to get in the door. The old man was ashamed of his son for turning his back on the Catholic church and marrying so many women. Hy-

acinthe barely spoke to Rock during the visit, and looked uncomfortable when one of the women pulled out a camera and asked them to pose for a family picture. Pierrette, however, doted on her eldest son, asking him about his health and her grandchildren.

The group also paid a visit to the Lambert residence, but Paul Lambert promptly left the cottage, refusing to be under the same roof as his daughter's polygamist husband. Chantal's parents, who had tried years earlier to have their daughter committed, never even received a phone call. Rock and his wives apparently blamed them for their troubles with the police.

The Boilards had a good chuckle one morning when Rock awoke to find the tires slashed on his van. They assumed one of the Lamberts was behind it.

After repairing the damage, Rock and his wives drove over to a barbecue hosted by Solange's oldest sister, Gisèle Martineau. "To tell the truth, it was kind of nice," she recalled. "They sang and played guitar, and we all ate hot dogs. Thériault was actually quite gallant."

Back home, the catalog of violence kept growing. There were so many mind-numbing atrocities that after a while the commune members lost track of them all. The only thing they knew for sure was that Rock's god was furious at them. He *had* to be, or why would Moses be doing such dreadful things?

The roster of potential charges drawn up later by the police was a veritable litany of horrors.

There was the time he fired up the acetylene torch and, while Gabrielle held Josée tight in her arms, passed the flame back and forth over Josée's

back and shoulders, roasting the flesh until the skin bubbled up.

There was the time he took the torch to Nicole's stomach on the day that she gave birth to her first child, a son.

There was the time he smacked Jacques in the forehead with the blunt edge of an ax and smashed his ribs with a wooden club.

There was the time he punched Rock Jr. in the face after he refused to fight his brother François.

There was the time he punched and kicked Nicole in the stomach when she was three months' pregnant, causing her to abort.

There was the time he fired a .303 bullet through Nicole's right shoulder.

There was the time he threw Gisèle to the ground, kicked her in the head and broke her ribs with his steel-toed workboots.

There was the time he held Claude's right foot in his hands and bent each of the toes backwards until it snapped.

There was the time he grabbed a piece of broken glass and ran the sharp edge along Claude's left arm from his shoulder to his arm, slicing it open.

There was the time he took a pair of pliers and yanked eleven healthy teeth out of Claude's mouth.

There was the time he ordered one of the women to strike Claude's leg twice with a sledgehammer, breaking it.

There was the time he took a pair of vicegrips and squeezed Gabrielle's and Gisèle's nipples until they bled.

There was the time he ordered Jacques to tie Claude's hands and ankles together behind his back and hang him from a beam for an hour.

There was the time he ordered several of his

wives to pluck out every one of Claude's pubic hairs.

There was the time he poured boiling water over Claude's shoulders and back.

There was the time he picked Claude up and sat him down on a hot stove, searing his buttocks.

There was the time he beat the commune's Belgian workhorse to death with chains and then ordered Claude to burn the carcass.

There was the time he forced Claude to eat human excrement.

There was the time he forced Claude to bite into a dead mouse as punishment for missing the rodent when he was cleaning house.

There was the time he punched Solange in the neck, knocking her unconscious.

There was the time he fired a .22 bullet at Claude, grazing his scalp.

There was the time he ordered Nicole and Chantal to hold Gabrielle down while Jacques pounded her right thigh with a sledgehammer.

There was the time he placed Gabrielle's right hand in a vice at the sawmill and tightened it while she screamed.

There was the time he lashed Gabrielle in the eye with his belt.

There was the time he plunged a needle into Gabrielle's back, gave her an injection of an unknown solution and twisted the needle until it snapped, leaving the broken tip embedded in her flesh.

There was the time he burned Gabrielle's right breast with the welding torch and singed the hair around her vagina.

There was the time he ordered Jacques to cut off half of the baby finger on Gabrielle's left hand with a pair of wire cutters.

There was the time he fractured the fingers on both of Gabrielle's hands by smacking them with a board when she tried to defend herself from his punches.

There was the time he forced Gabrielle to go outside naked in the winter, cut a hole in the ice of the frozen pond and jump in.

There was the time he threw a knife at Francine, causing a five-inch laceration on her left hip.

There was the time he threw a knife at Marise, penetrating her right foot.

There was the time he slammed Solange on the floor when she was six months' pregnant, and broke her cheekbone with his fist.

The catalog of violence in the police files went on and on and on and on. Whether each and every one of these atrocities in fact happened can never be proved because they never reached the courts.

None of Rock's victims blamed him for their injuries. He was simply following the Master's orders. Rock called it "the law of reciprocity": they had sinned and had to be punished. When Rock beat, stabbed and shot at them, he was only trying to rid their bodies of Satan. He was helping them. For as Moses himself explained, those who did not suffer during this life would never be allowed to enter heaven.

When he sobered up, Rock became an angel of mercy. "He always took good care of us afterwards," Claude said. "Like with my burns, they were very well treated. He took very good care of me for all of the other things, too."

The more outrageous Rock's attacks became, the more his followers held him in awe. Sometimes they even wrote letters to him after his rampages, reaffirming their love for him and making it clear that they didn't take it personally.

Good day Moses, my Master,

I would have liked to have talked to you yesterday evening but I think it is preferable to write these things rather than saying them for fear of talking too much. I am going to talk to you about the last fit of anger that your Master exercised through you. I really believe that what you did doesn't come from you, but from someone much higher. For my part, I really believe that you were possessed by a very powerful spirit. That's what I saw in what you did: the throwing of the knife, the rifle shot, the harm done to Mamy. My eyes saw things that went beyond them. My body is very afraid of all these things. I understand it very well because of the Law of Death in which it exists, but within myself I am well. I am very well and very happy to belong to a REAL MASTER who himself belongs to the only real Master of Life.

Love, Rachel [Solange]

CHAPTER 17

'TIL DEATH US DO PART



In the early days of the life of the group, Solange Boilard was outspoken and did not hesitate to contradict the ideas of the accused. This earned her many beatings. Ultimately, however, she became one of the members of the group most devoted to the accused and his ideas. In the months before her death, she occupied a special place at the camp. She played the role of governor. She was extremely close to the accused, acting as an intermediary between the accused and the rest of his followers. She also ran the bakery business, keeping the books and directing the work. It appeared to the members of the group that the accused loved Solange Boilard—Rachel—and placed a special confidence in her. He was also extremely demanding of her. Physically, she was not well. All the members of the group suffered from lack of sleep, working as they did in the bakery enterprise, and on various projects at the camp, from early in the morning until late at night, as well as from a lack of sufficient nutritious food. Solange Boilard was no different.

—Statement of facts agreed to by the Crown attorney and Rock Thériault's lawyer,

January 18, 1993, Ontario Court (General Division)

A couple of weeks before Rock did his operation on Solange, the two of us had run away into the bush to hide for two or three days. That's when she told me that she'd decided to leave. She said, "I want to leave here. And when I leave I won't be like you. When I get past the fence, I won't stop. I'll never come back." I could tell she was serious.

—Gisèle Tremblay

Solange was very close to Rock's heart. I could tell she was his favorite wife. He really needed her for several matters because she was very smart. She was kind of like a right arm for his business.

—Gabrielle Lavallée

At the beginning of the fall of 1988, Solange had not been feeling well for some time. Rock was aware of this and said more than one time that she would need treatment or an operation. She was no sicker this day than any other day. Rock made her believe that her sickness was because of her liver. She preferred to take a beer rather than eat because it made her feel better. I had never heard Solange talk about having a liver problem.

—Claude Ouellette

That afternoon, he had been drinking and brought out his jewellery. He started picking on us. He started boasting. He was choking the women, and then he said there were members of the group who were sick. Nobody would ever admit to any sick-

nesses because they were afraid that Rock would do something to them.

—Gisèle Tremblay

This one day, Solange was made to work very hard with a shovel and a wheelbarrow. She was made to work on the road. She was working so hard it was affecting her breathing. It was Rock who told me to make her work hard. Rock was mad at Solange. He felt that she was too outspoken and she was a threat to him. I could see she was having trouble breathing. I went to her and told her to slow down.

Rock had started to drink in the afternoon and decided he had to go into the house and change his clothes. He took his clothes off and draped himself in a silk sheet and a crown of some kind. The silk things were yellow or red. Chantal and Nicole helped him to get dressed. He also put on his special ring. After he was dressed, he came outside to speak to us. When he got dressed like this he wanted us to kneel and kiss his ring. We did this so he wouldn't get mad.

—Claude Ouellette

The accused spoke with Solange Boilard, while she was outside working. She went down on her knees before him. As night fell, he brought Solange Boilard to the bakery where the remainder of the group had been working all day.

—Agreed statement of facts

Rock was very drunk and was looking at everybody strangely.

—Gabrielle Lavallée

Rock began to choke Solange and Sara [Marise]. He put articles of clothing in their mouths so that they couldn't speak and they would lose their breath. He was quite drunk. He asked the girls if they knew that their breath belonged to him. He made them choke until they started to turn blue. The girls were unable to say anything—he wanted them just to gesture with their heads. At that point, he would take the garments out of their mouths.

After Solange and Sara, he said, "Mamy, come here. It's your turn." I was very afraid. But then another idea flashed into his head. He wanted us to go and get his jewellery. I looked at the door and thought of a way that I could get out. I couldn't take it anymore. I was able to escape through the back and I left for Quebec.

—Gisèle Tremblay

The accused was in the habit of displaying his jewellery and of asking various members of the group to guess its value. He did so on this occasion, asking Solange Boilard to take a guess. Subsequently he became angry and pushed Solange Boilard around.

—Agreed statement of facts

She looked frightened. He grabbed her by the shoulders and shook her. Solange agreed with Rock that he was the leader, the Master.

—Claude Ouellette

He said, "Rachel, are you ready? I'm going to treat you tonight."

—Gabrielle Lavallée

Solange Boilard, who had been suffering from stomach problems for some time, indicated she

needed to be treated. The accused no longer appeared angry. . . . He was calm. The table in the bakery was cleared off. Solange Boilard undressed herself and lay down on the table.

—Agreed statement of facts

We put a plastic cover and a wool blanket on the table with a pillow.

—Marise Lambert

On that day, late in the afternoon, I went to buy beer. I stopped in Fenelon Falls but the Brewers Retail was closed. I continued on to Orillia and bought two twenty-four-packs of O'Keefe. When I got back to the camp it was after midnight. Everyone was in the bakery. Someone asked me to sharpen a knife to be used for an operation on Rachel's liver. I prepared the knife and gave it to Rock. Rachel was seated on the bakery table and was talking to the others. We laid her down on the table and I held her right hand. She was still talking to the others and I heard Thériault say something like, "I am going to relieve your liver problems and you are going to be cured." He asked that someone bless his hands.

—Jacques Giguère

I think that Gabrielle Lavallée prepared a solution. I think it was some molasses with water. Rock had a red rubber bag made for enemas, and he put the tube in Solange's rectum. I didn't like that very much so I didn't watch.

—Marise Lambert

He started by putting his finger, the middle one, in her rectum and was moving it in and out. He then tried to put the enema tube in. He was rough. He was not putting it in properly and the excrement

was coming out on the table. The enema fluid was molasses, water and oil. He was putting the tube in and taking it out and telling her not to be embarrassed to relieve herself. I would say he spent twenty to thirty minutes doing this. Everybody was scared and nervous. She looked like she was in great pain. Everybody was made to watch.

—Claude Ouellette

Rock was always telling us that we had to suffer in this world if we wanted to be with God in Heaven. I think that's why she accepted the operation so passively.

—Gisèle Tremblay

In the bakery, the accused began pressing hard against Solange Boilard's stomach with his hands. He punched her hard in the stomach several times. When she attempted to protect herself with her hands, he told her to take her hands away, which she did.

—Agreed statement of facts

A clear plastic tube about a quarter of an inch in diameter was put into her stomach. I don't know if it went through the nose or the mouth. Everybody present was ordered to either blow or suck on this tube. He told us why we had to do it, but I don't remember the reason. He told Solange that she must have an operation. He told her in a smooth way. Solange asked me to hold her hand, which I did.

—Claude Ouellette

Suddenly Rock had a knife and came close to Solange.

—Marise Lambert

After that, Rock made an incision of about five or five and a half inches on the right side, below the rib cage.

—Jacques Giguère

It was a vertical cut on her right side below the rib.

—Claude Ouellette

He put the fingers of both hands inside and he removed a piece of fat, something beige, which was a little longer and wider than a finger, and about a quarter inch thick. He tore this piece off and placed it on a counter beside the table. Rock said to Rachel, "There. You're going to be all right."

—Jacques Giguère

What he took out looked like an intestine. It is white. He held it and with his other hand he ripped a piece off, a piece about four inches long. He handed the piece to someone to conserve it. He placed the other part back into the abdomen.

—Claude Ouellette

She was conscious the whole time. She never uttered a word, like she accepted everything.

—Gabrielle Lavallée

Somebody sewed her up. I was talking all this time with Rachel. She got up and was walking around and talking.

—Jacques Giguère

Rock forced her to get up from the table to walk around. Everybody was frozen in place. She walked out by herself and went up to the cabin. Then she

walked up the stairs there and she lay down on her bed.

—Gabrielle Lavallée

She passed a night of suffering in the sleeping loft.

—Agreed statement of facts

Francine Laflamme and me, we kept an eye on her the whole night, giving our hands to her all the time. She said, "Well, I never thought I would suffer that much in my life."

—Gabrielle Lavallée

The next morning I went to see Solange. She told me that she didn't realize the body could endure so much pain. She was suffering, you could see that. She hadn't slept all night.

—Claude Ouellette

She received two baths. The first one was warm, with different kinds of herbs—cherry herbs, mainly. Rock said that it would be good for her, it would stimulate her. But in the bath she got worse. She became paralyzed. I could see this by her hands. She got all stiff. And all the time Rock was inebriated. Then he let the water out and he gave her a cold bath.

—Gabrielle Lavallée

To me she didn't look good. I carried her to a mattress upstairs and laid her there.

—Jacques Giguère

We lay her down on her bed and blood came out through her mouth. All the suffering she went through was over.

—Gabrielle Lavallée

In the opinion of Dr. Donald Currie, a medical expert, Solange Boilard's death was likely due to acute peritonitis, caused by the leaking of digestive chemicals in the abdominal cavity, resulting in severe inflammation of the peritoneum—a fatal condition, if not treated.

—Agreed statement of facts

Rock asked us to get the stretcher and we covered her up with a wool blanket. Then he forced us to bring her to the sanctuary.

—Gabrielle Lavallée

I then took your still warm body and carried it before the altar of the Master, to present you to him like a lamb without flaws, and I thanked him for that which was happening. After that, I laid your body down facing the entrance to the altar. You were nude. I tore off my clothes and I lay on top of you, crying out my pain and my bitterness. I asked Nathan to kill me because I couldn't live without you. He started to cry, "No Moses . . . No Moses . . . Moses." I brought your body back to the house and I laid it down in my bed. I covered you with your blanket and I lay near you, my leg over your lower abdomen as I loved to do when you were alive, and I spoke words of love to you.

—Letter written by Rock Thériault to Solange Boilard after her death

We left for work and we brought flowers for her and when we came back we learned that she'd died. She was nude and on top of Rock's bed. Her fists were clenched in front of her. We cried when we saw her. Rock was on the chesterfield. He told me that I would be responsible for Solange's duties—

that she would have to be replaced. He had got booze somewhere and was drunk.

—Claude Ouellette

After that I asked Nathan to build a coffin from pine which we had cut together—you remember the beautiful wide boards. How those things were precious to you! The next day I put your body in the coffin, and I covered your skin with blankets that each one of the people had given. I sprinkled perfume and talcum, and each person embraced you as did I, and we all cried out together: "So long Lamb, Rachel." I covered your face again, put your Bible on your front and put on the cover.

—Rock Thériault's letter to the deceased

Then Jacques and I dug a grave. We were so weak from not eating that the women had to come and help us. A group of six carried the coffin to the grave and another two were there to replace those getting tired. Prayers were said and branches were put on the top.

—Claude Ouellette

I miss your crazy antics. I would like to . . . crouch like a little man in the heat, mild and tender, of your lamb's womb.

—Rock Thériault's letter to the deceased

Rock came to me and stared into my eyes and told me he wanted me to kill him. He told me to get the .303 rifle and shoot him. I refused. . . . He sat in the white van and we put exhaust into the van through flexible tubes. The windows were up. Rock was in there for about an hour, but he did not lose

consciousness. It was me who got him out. Then he took one or two bottles of Tylenol and again he did not lose consciousness. After that we put him in a bath tub with his feet and hands tied with strips of blanket. He started to fight very hard and we took him out.

—Jacques Giguère

Suddenly an idea came clearly to me: kill myself and join you. What happened after that is terrible, dear Rachel. In three attempts the group tried to kill me. The first time by carbon monoxide gas without success, the second time I took 375 Tylenol Extra Strength tablets, again with negative results. Then we had the idea to break my neck, but instead of killing me the blow gave me a mild relief of my pain —this amazed me. We finally decided to tie me up and plunge me under water to bring on death by drowning. I can't say how long I was under water, but at one point a white light appeared before me and a strange force entered my arms and tore the bindings from me. I came out of the water yelling, "God doesn't want me to die!"

—Rock Thériault's letter to the deceased

CHAPTER 18

THE SHAMAN



About a week after Solange's death, Jacques hiked through the bush to a neighbor's house and asked to borrow the phone to call Gisèle at her parents' place in St.-Joseph-de-la-Rive. Trying to keep his voice down so that he wouldn't be overheard, he explained to her that he had important news, but it wasn't safe to talk about it over the telephone.

Gisèle's intuition told her that something horrible had happened. "Don't hang up—let me guess," she exclaimed. She asked Jacques if someone in the group had been badly hurt or killed.

Her heart sank when she heard his reply. Long ago, she and Solange had been bitter rivals, but in the last few years they had begun to confide in each other. When she heard, Gisèle thought briefly about killing herself, but then abandoned the idea. She saw that she didn't have the right to take her own life. It was up to Moses to decide who would live and who would die. Solange had understood that as much as anyone, and now she was dead.

A few days later, Rock phoned and asked Gisèle to meet him in Quebec. He needed her even more now that Solange was dead. He was sorry for all of the bad things that had happened and he swore that

he would stop drinking once and for all. Perhaps they could start a new life, he suggested. He asked Gisèle to find an apartment in Quebec City, leaving his intentions vague.

Once again Gisèle fell into the trap. She was still in Rock's thrall, held there by fear, love and blind devotion to his warped teachings. Besides, she told herself, she had nowhere else to go. She went straight to Quebec City and rented an apartment. But by the time Rock arrived, he had abandoned any plan he might have had to stay there. After the first night he hustled her into the truck and drove back to Ontario. All the way, he lambasted her for taking off from the group—she had no right to do that without his approval. On top of that, it was a hell of an inconvenience to have to drive nine hundred kilometers each way just to pick her up. He had better things to do with his time. For one thing, he had to get down to Utah as soon as possible to consult with Jess Groesbeck, the brilliant psychiatrist. Solange's death had put some ideas in his head, and he was anxious to talk them over with the doctor.

After a quick phone call to Groesbeck from Burnt River, Rock and Gisèle caught the train from Toronto to Salt Lake City. They arrived early in the morning on Sunday, October 16.

Groesbeck was overjoyed to see his Canadian friend. He picked the two visitors up at the Amtrak station and drove them back to his palatial, custom-built home in the secluded desert foothills south of the Utah capital. But in contrast to his normal, outgoing self, Rock seemed strangely subdued. As soon as they passed through the imposing entrance of the house, he handed the doctor a two-page handwritten letter from the commune nurse, Gabrielle. It explained that "Rachel" had "succumbed of a pulmonary embolism." Her death was "a great lost

[sic] to Rock's heart, plunging him in an unfathomable sorrow."

Groesbeck couldn't quite remember which of Rock's wives was Rachel. Rock showed him a photograph of Solange and explained that he'd rescued her from illicit drug use twelve years ago. Her parents had disowned her when she joined his group. She'd borne three girls by Rock, each of which had been spirited away by the government. As if that wasn't tragic enough, Rachel had become quite sick during the last few months. She'd taken to drinking four or five beers a day and her skin had turned a waxy yellow. She'd stopped taking care of herself and wasn't eating properly.

As they talked, Groesbeck took notes.

Rock has been close to Rachel, but about six months ago he really fell in love with her. He describes many deep experiences with her. He states that some six months ago he began to make love with her more than in the past. They would have a preparation time of teasing and playing, much like teenagers with a great love and feeling. She would wash him almost like a baby. She would wash herself. It would be a very sacred act. She would lie with him. And finally on this one occasion, she asked if he would give her a boy just like him. He then told her that he wanted to go inside her, just like a baby would do, inside her womb and be close to her heart. He then stated that when he was lying upon her, and later when she sat upon him, having sexual intercourse, that he felt a drawing sensation, and even the hand of God, that he felt almost a visionary experience that helped draw him to her and then he had a sexual relationship that was most overwhelm-

ing and meaningful. He felt deeply, deeply in love with her from then on. He took her for walks in the woods. She called him a bushman. They had wonderful times and played together.



Rock said that eighteen days earlier, when he was out surveying the beauty of his Ontario domain, Rachel came up to him and said, "Moses, you are my God." Suddenly, out of the blue, she began to choke. Blood gushed from her nose and mouth. Her eyes rolled back in their sockets and she collapsed, dying in Rock's arms. It was a devastating experience.

Groesbeck reassured his friend that there was nothing he or anyone else could have done to save his beloved wife. From the description, it sounded as though she'd suffered from chronic liver disease. Groesbeck surmised that a vein in her esophagus had burst, causing her to drown in her own blood.

Rock said he wasn't angry at God, but he was deeply worried. Years earlier, another of his wives had died and the police had taken the body away. It had upset him no end. He was determined not to let it happen again, so they had decided to keep Rachel's death a secret from the outside world—even her parents. He told the psychiatrist that he had undressed the corpse, washed it and lain on top of it for a time, holding the head. Then he had carried the body to his altar, anointed it with purified perfumes to keep it preserved and buried it in a safe place. Rock explained that he had once worked in a funeral home and wanted everything to be perfect.

He also stated that he prayed to God and God told him that I [Groesbeck] was his

prophet. . . . I would give him the direction and advice he would need. God would speak through me.



Groesbeck listened with fascination as Rock began talking about the changes that had overtaken him since Rachel's tragic death. He couldn't sleep; he was feverish. One night he had a vision of her dressed all in white and smiling. A few days after that, he could have sworn he heard her voice coming from inside his abdomen.

"How can you be inside me?" Rock asked her.

Solange explained that she was small and naked, curled up in a white, curved room inside his body. In those dark moments when the grief of her death would overwhelm him, Rock would converse with Solange, and she would assure him that she was doing fine.

Rock was also having strange dreams. In one, a Christ-like figure appeared alongside David and Moses and gave him a sword and a chariot with a team of horses that breathed purple fire. Rock took the sword and began to knock planes out of the sky.

In another dream, Rock was summoned before a tribunal. He was tried and found guilty for being a human being, but refused to accept the verdict. "It isn't me that created me," he told the judge. "You created me, so I am not responsible." The judge agreed, and rewarded Rock with a house on a mountain. Rock was looking forward to living there with Rachel, but then realized that she was still inside him. He became sad, realizing he would never see her again.

Then the judge spoke again. "I once had a wife inside me, too, and it's all right. I know what it feels like."

At that point, Rock told Groesbeck, he turned around and saw a tree. He went behind it, took out his penis and began to masturbate. When he ejaculated, the sperm took the shape of Rachel's head. Gradually her whole body emerged. Rock embraced her and they had sexual intercourse. He woke up feeling happy for the first time since her death. Rock knew that she was at peace and that she loved him.

Though I didn't mention it at the time, I thought of the man Adam, who out of his penis, comes the fruit of life. It speaks to male pregnancy and how one gives birth and death. There is death in birth, with the relationship to the feminine and to a woman. This is maybe as powerful an experience as a man can have about the mysteries of Godliness.

Rock told me this while we were outside our home . . . this evening . . . as we walked up hills and looked out over the city and saw the moon. Rock then cried and broke down and embraced me as I embraced him. I told him I love him, and he loved me—in this profound and moving experience.

The next day, Groesbeck took his guest to see the graves of his Mormon ancestors. They would have understood Rock, the doctor said, because they too had lived according to the principle of plural marriage. He assured the visitor that his visions were Solange's way of letting him know that he had done the right thing. Without knowing it, he had followed the path of the ancient shamans, doing what was necessary to transport his dead wife's soul to

the next life. Now that his work was done, Solange was free to go "to the other side."

But Rock wouldn't let go of the subject. He started talking about the Biblical story of Adam and Eve, and how Eve had been created from Adam's rib. Now that Rachel was dead, he felt certain that she was entering one of his own ribs. Soon his abdomen would begin to swell, much like Rachel's had when she was pregnant.

To Groesbeck, it sounded like an intriguing idea —a kind of "reverse birth."

He finally told me that he feels that someday in heaven, he will actually give birth to a body of Rachel that is growing within him. I told him, well, that might be possible, but we would have to wait and see. But it certainly wouldn't be in this life. (These can certainly border on delusional ideas, but they are not, depending on how he approaches them and handles them). . . .

This opened up the door to me thinking of a whole new concept—that birth from heaven, from the Spirit World down to this earth in a mortal body, is through a woman, and the passage from this earth, back up to heaven, a spiritual journey, is through man, and it is through the spiritual rebirth process in a man. For example, Rock has the idea now that Esther [Gisèle] will enter through his belly just like Rachel, and be implanted in it, and even all the other six wives. And that's why Rock, in many ways, feels that he cannot die until they have died, because he has got to go through that process with them and birthing them to get into heaven.

This is a remarkable cycle and opens up many implications.



When Gisèle heard what Rock and his rich American psychiatrist friend had been talking about, she doubled up in laughter.

She and Papy had gone for a walk in the arid hills behind Groesbeck's house. Unable to speak English very well, she was curious about what had transpired during the hours of intense conversation.

"Mamy, Dr. Groesbeck told me something and I really want to hear what you think about it," Rock said excitedly. "He told me I'm probably pregnant with Rachel."

"What?!" Gisèle cried.

"No, it's true," Rock replied, rubbing his stomach contentedly with both hands. "I think I can feel her inside me. And sometimes I can even hear her voice."

Gisèle tried to cut Rock off, but he wouldn't stop.

"You see, it's like Dr. Groesbeck keeps saying. When a man enters the world, he does it through a woman, through her vagina. But the passage from this world back to heaven is through man. When a woman dies, the only way she can be reborn is to be implanted in man's belly. Dr. Groesbeck even has a name for it. It's a reverse birth."

Gisèle couldn't believe her ears. For years she had listened carefully to this man's preachings about God and the Bible, soaking up every word. Now suddenly he was claiming that it was possible for a man to get pregnant. It was all too much to take. Either he was crazy or she was.

"No, Rock, I'm sorry," Gisèle sputtered. "You can't defy the laws of nature. If God created women

to have children, it's the woman who's going to have the children."

Rock looked crestfallen. How could Gisèle be worried about the laws of nature at a time like this? He felt sure that he could bring Solange back to life. Why, even the famous Dr. Groesbeck had called him a shaman.

That night, Rock and his Mormon mentor had a lengthy, impassioned discussion about dreams, mysticism and sexuality. Groesbeck spoke of shamanism and male birth, and brought out Volume Twelve of the Collected Works of Carl Jung. Inside, in a section headed "Religious Ideas in Alchemy," was a 14th century engraving of Adam with a tree—the symbol of life—growing out of his phallus. Wasn't that strangely similar to Rock's experience? It seemed to be a confirmation of Rock's vision in which Rachel's body had emerged from his sperm.

While Groesbeck listened intently, Rock began to reminisce about his early experiences with Rachel. Their first sexual encounter had taken place one summer day years earlier when he was sitting by a stream. According to Rock, she came up to him and said she wanted to taste his semen. She took his penis in her mouth and stimulated him. "This is life. This is meaning," she said after swallowing his sperm.

Groesbeck hurried over to his bookcase and grabbed another volume, this one devoted to the spiritual practises of the Plains Indians. Rock's experience was just like the traditional marriage ceremony of the Sioux, he pointed out. In the first part of the ceremony, the woman performed oral sex as a ritual act, "taking in the divine seed of man as God."

I felt a deep connection; we prayed together. Rock felt that God had his hand on him and was forcing him to do things he didn't want to do, and he had little choice in his life except to love his wives. . . .

It just continues to amaze me how many true principles and deep powerful Gospel laws this man has had revealed to him, without even knowing basic ordinances and teachings of the Gospel of Christ; but he knows them and that is the fact. It is truly revelation to know this.



At the end of the three-day visit, Rock mentioned that he wanted to marry his deceased wife because during their time together they had never been officially wed. Alex Joseph had performed such rituals many times before, and could help him put his family in order.

"He doesn't believe in Alex Joseph as a person—he smokes," Groesbeck wrote in his notes. "But he feels that he may have power independent of himself that may be valuable and by which he can reach God."

In fact, Groesbeck himself had already played a valuable role in Moses' quest for spiritual power. Unwittingly, he had fed the commune leader's delusions and allowed Rock to think of himself as outside the bounds of the law and reality.



Even before his last talk with Groesbeck, Rock had put in a call to Alex. The gun-toting patriarch asked an associate who lived in Salt Lake City, a lapsed Mormon named Willy Marshall, to pick up Rock and Gisèle and bring them down to his Big Water

compound. As they cruised along Interstate 15, Rock explained to Marshall, who spoke French, that he was a doctor of naturopathy. He dumped a thick manuscript into the bearded American's lap and told him that it contained his life story. Perhaps Marshall would be interested in translating it from French to English, he asked. Marshall said that he would take a look at it. Rock's delight soon gave way to anguish, however, as he launched into a long monologue about Rachel's death, interrupted by fits of sobbing. "He talked about how one of his wives had been sick and that when he tried to help her she died," Marshall recalled. "Then it got weird. He started going on about how she'd gotten really small and had entered his heart and all this stuff. It was a little spacy. My impression was that he was pretty weird, but essentially harmless."

When the bewildered Marshall finally pulled into Alex's parking lot, the cowboy polygamist was crouched in his courtyard in soiled work clothes, planting trees. Without bothering to introduce Gisèle, Rock bolted from the car and rushed toward him, bawling about Rachel. "He was wanting to hug me and all this stuff, but I'm up to my butt in shrubs and I've got manure all over my hands," recalled Alex. "I'm trying to tell him, 'Okay, just calm down. Let me finish this here.' "

But Rock couldn't wait. Tripping over his words, he told Alex that he was ready to take on the responsibility of ordination and wanted to give Solange the wedding she'd never had. He'd even brought one of his *other* wives along to be the proxy, he said, pointing to Gisèle. Before Alex could get a word in, Rock started jabbering about Rachel's death again. He said that he had rushed her to the hospital but it was too late to rescue his poor lamb from the cancer that was eating away at her liver.

Alex could have sworn he heard Rock say something about being pregnant with Rachel, but he wrote it off as a language problem. *He must have meant that his heart was full of this woman,* Alex told himself, giving his head a quick shake. *Some day either I'm gonna learn French or this guy'll learn English and we'll finally understand each other.*

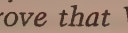
After sunset, Alex invited Rock and Gisèle to join him in the lounge with his wives. With so many women around to impress, Rock slipped into his raconteur mode, offering up fantastic accounts of his trip to France two months earlier. He described how he'd gone to the French bureau of antiquities in Paris and obtained a permit to excavate some burial grounds in Normandy, where he claimed his ancestors originated. He located the site in a swamp near the coast. A voice inside his head told him to begin jumping up and down. After a few hops, a stone cross bearing the inscription "Rolla" rose out of the marshy ground.

Alex recognized the name. Rolla was shorthand for Robert I, the eleventh century duke of Normandy. Known also as Robert the Devil because he was such a stern ruler, he was the father of William the Conquerer.

What I'm thinking is, this sucker is nuts. *But I guess the point he was making was that his genealogy was better than mine, right? One thing led to another and he started gettin' real combative and wavin' his arms around—like his bog-jumping was better than mine. I mean, I don't know anything about France. For all I know, they may have a Washington Monument-type thing for Rolla.*

Anyhow, we move on and he starts blabber-

ing about Einstein. It turns out I don't know as much about Einstein as I should if I'm gonna be allowed to continue to live. I tried telling Rock that I was well aware of who Albert Einstein was but I didn't have a strong interest in his works. But I was a student of a guy who knew Einstein, Immanuel Velikovsky [a Russian-born writer who outraged the scientific community with his theories of creation and history]. He wants to have this showdown and prove that Velikovsky wasn't half the mathematician that Einstein was, but he's having this fight all by himself. I mean, these two figures were in completely different fields. It's kind of like comparing the physicist Edward Teller to Walt Disney. It's a complete miss.



As always, Alex Joseph had a lot of friends dropping by. Rock quickly ingratiated himself by handing out jars of Ant Hill Kids maple syrup. Gisèle had a special gift tucked away in her suitcase for Alex, a landscape she had painted of the group's Ontario property. Alex was immediately struck by Rock's shy and demure wife—"a real sweetheart." Alex figured she must have seen something in Rock that he wasn't showing the rest of them. Indeed, Gisèle seemed to change everyone's mind about Rock. Even Alex's lawyer wife, Elizabeth, remarked that the erratic Frenchman was a different person around Esther.

In fact, Gisèle was having more fun than she'd had in years. In late October it was still warm enough to swim in Lake Powell, and Alex and his sons took her out water skiing behind his powerboat. Skimming across the desert lake, surrounded

by towering red and orange sculpted cliffs, it was easy to forget for a few happy hours the horrific events back in Burnt River. Rock castigated his thirty-seven-year-old wife afterward for "playing around" while the memory of poor Rachel was still so fresh—"Don't you have any respect for the dead?"—but Gisèle was enjoying herself too much to let it bother her.

Rock, who carried his black doctor's bag with him at all times, went around providing medical services to Alex's family. After she banged her leg in a game of sandlot baseball, Elizabeth said, Rock applied an herbal poultice that brought down the swelling twice as fast as any conventional treatment. Later, when one of Alex's teenaged sons complained of pain in his abdomen, Rock examined him and correctly diagnosed a hernia. The boy made it to the hospital just in time to avoid serious complications.

A day or two after that incident, Gisèle asked Alex if she could speak to him in private. She was obviously torn up about something. Glancing now and then at a note that seemed to be in Rock's handwriting, she explained that her husband had been mistreated all his life and that nobody had ever given him his due.

"Rock, you know, he's so good to me," Gisèle said in her broken English. "All the time I'm thinking, maybe I'm not so good for him. So, anyway, I like it if I give to him something special. A surprise, you know?"

Alex nodded. He admired her devotion.

But her question took him aback. It turned out that she wanted him to build a crown for Rock.

Alex being Alex, it wasn't really such a bizarre request. He actually did have a crown tucked away in one of his vaults. He and some associates had

constructed it twenty years earlier, using nickel-plated metal, semi-precious stones and blue velvet. It was part of a collection of family "artifacts," including a scepter, religious robes and a fancy wooden box in which he stored baptismal and ordination certificates. Alex didn't actually use the crown himself, but he sometimes let people pose in it and sit on the big wooden throne in the main hall just so they could see how it felt to be "king for a minute."

"Don't worry about it," Alex told Gisèle. He disappeared and came back with a box. "Think of it as my gift to you."

Gisèle wept when she lifted the lid and saw the crown.

The wedding of Rock and Solange took place late in the evening on the fourth day of Rock's stay, October 22. Everyone got into ceremonial costume. Alex's wives dressed up in white gowns and Gisèle wore a blue dress with a white veil. Alex put on his satin priest's robe, with stripes in each of the four main colors of his flag—blue, red, yellow and white. Rock donned a pair of sandals and the red robe the girls had made for him back in Ontario. Not to be outdone by his host, he had even brought along the red, blue and yellow-striped flag from Burnt River. He made a show of draping it over the back of the throne.

It was a solemn affair, except for the kids who kept running in and out of the hall. Willy Marshall provided simultaneous French translation as Alex pronounced the vows.

Do you, Lord Rock Moïse Thériault, take Lady Solange Rachel by the right hand and receive her unto yourself, to be your lawful and wedded wife, and you to be her lawful and

wedded husband, for time and for all eternity, with a contract and promise on your part that you will fulfill all the laws, rites, and ordinances pertaining to this holy matrimony, in the new and everlasting contract, doing this in the presence of God, angels, and these witnesses, of your own free will and choice?



After Rock said, "I do," the bride's vows were read and Gisèle answered for Rachel. As the two knelt at the center of an astronomical symbol on the floor, Alex crossed his arms and placed his hands on Rock's and Gisèle's heads. He pronounced Rock and Solange man and wife, and admonished them to "be faithful and multiply, and replenish the earth, that you may have joy and rejoicing in your posterity in the day our fathers come with our King." Gisèle signed Solange's name on the marriage certificate. Alex signed on the line reserved for the "King of Israel," and his wives Diana, Joanna and Dawn put their names down as witnesses.

For good measure, Rock got married three more times. He began by renewing his vows to Gisèle. Then he wed Gabrielle Nadeau, the multiple sclerosis patient who had died in his care at the Quebec commune, and Gabrielle Lavallée—who at that very moment was recovering from one of Rock's punishments in Burnt River.

Then came the part Rock had *really* been looking forward to—his ordination. In an elaborate ceremony lasting about thirty minutes, Alex appointed the self-styled Moses to the office of "Elder Apostle" and King over his lawful realm—in other words, his two hundred acres of scrub land in the poorest part of Victoria County. Again, Alex signed Rock's certificate of "Ordination and Appoint-

ment" on behalf of the King of Israel, and stamped it with his official seal. Finally, Gisèle scampered over with her secret box and placed the crown on Rock's head as the beaming new king reclined on his throne. Alex popped open bottles of California wine and proposed a toast.



Rock was puffed up with pride for days. But something was still nagging him. He told Alex and his wives again about how the Canadian government had persecuted him for years because of his adherence to a higher law—the Biblical principle of plural marriage. Alex's family knew what that was like, and they listened carefully. According to Rock, the police had burned and bulldozed his first commune in Quebec, a magnificent forest Xanadu, and thrown him in jail on a false charge. Next he had moved his tribe to Ontario, but it was the same story. During the past three years, government agents had kidnapped all eighteen commune children. How could he teach his progeny the ways of the Lord when they had been spirited off to foster homes? Fortunately, he hadn't lost heart. He was continuing to plant the seeds of his divinity in each of his remaining seven wives. One of them, Francine, was now eight months' pregnant. But the authorities were lurking in the background, waiting to pounce.

Alex took a long draw on his cigarette, sighed and fixed Rock with a loaded stare.

"Well, if you brought 'em down here, the government won't get 'em."

It was the response Rock had been angling for. He announced that he and Francine would return to Big Water in November so that she could have her baby. Rock and Francine would leave the infant in the U.S. for a while and then, once the Children's Aid

Society got off their backs, they would return to Utah to fetch the kid.

Three days after the wedding and ordination ceremonies, Alex whisked Rock and Gisèle off to the Amtrak station in Flagstaff, Arizona, a two-hour drive south through surreal desert landscapes. Along the way, Rock said something that troubled Alex deeply.

"He told me that the ultimate religious experience was for a man to eat one of his male offspring," Alex said.

Perhaps after Francine gave birth, the Utah polygamist thought to himself, it might be best for all concerned if Rock didn't ever take that kid back to Canada.

CHAPTER 19

EVE'S RIB



After Solange's death, Rock went to see that psychiatrist, Jess Groesbeck. And Groesbeck was into ritual, studying aboriginal rituals and voodoo. I mean, just because he's a psychiatrist doesn't mean he's all together himself. So after Rock got back from Utah, he had all those strange ideas he never had before.

—Gabrielle Lavallée

The same day we got back to the commune, Rock started to drink. And he told everybody, "I'm pregnant! I'm pregnant, and Rachel is going to grow out of me!" Then at dinner-time he said he'd probably better start watching his food now, because Dr. Groesbeck said he was going to have a baby.

All the time he kept saying he hated me. He wanted to kill me because I wasn't there when Rachel died. He said it was all my fault. He needed someone to take the blame. He looked at me and said, "I hate you. I hate you." And I thought it was all over for me.

That night he drank too much and he came in about midnight and wanted the girls to scalp me. He asked Marise to do it. Marise looked at me and then she looked at him and she said, "No, I'm not able to, I'm sorry." So Rock asked Nicole and Ni-

cole said, "Okay, sure." They cut all my hair off with a butcher's knife. Then Rock took a sharp blade and he cut into a vein on top of my head. He cut the vein and it bled.

—Gisèle Tremblay

A few days passed and Rock ordered me to exhume the body. Jacques and I dug up the grave. The coffin was taken and put behind the house. Rock ordered us to take the cover off.

—Claude Ouellette

We were like robots. We unearthed Rachel and brought back the coffin. When they opened the lid, her face looked like someone who had gone through a lot of suffering. She didn't have the tranquil face of someone who was dead but more of someone who was screaming.

And then Rock started. He wanted to open up her stomach. He wanted to look at her kidneys. We were all frozen. He had rifles and his knives. We were afraid of everything. So I went with Gabrielle. I stayed with her as she performed the operation. And Rock drank the rest of the night.

—Gisèle Tremblay

Rock asked me to put vinegar on her body so that the worms wouldn't touch it. Then he asked me to remove some parts of her body—the uterus and the kidneys. I couldn't find one of them, so Jacques came and put them in a jar.

—Gabrielle Lavallée

Then we closed the coffin and reburied Rachel. After that, maybe four days passed. He started hitting us and throwing knives, firing his gun at us, all sorts of things. He kept telling us that it was our

fault. He wanted to get back at us for Rachel's death and kill us all. According to him, God was asking for that. We were like vegetables. Then he wanted me to go back, dig her up and bring her back but I couldn't, so the others came with me to help. We opened the coffin again. Rachel was starting to decompose—it was horrible.

And then he asked us to get the [medical] books to practice for a lobotomy. I wasn't sure exactly what that was. To me a lobotomy is when you exchange heads with one person on another. He asked Jacques to make a hole in Rachel's skull, using a drill. Jacques was crying. And then Jacques started to open the skull of Rachel using a blade.

—Gisèle Tremblay

I drilled a hole in her forehead. I didn't understand why we did any of this. Rock was in such a state I assumed he had a reason. I know I tried to remove a kidney, but I can't remember which time.

—Jacques Giguère

We thought God was speaking to Rock. God was commanding him to do these things.

—Gisèle Tremblay

It was a manual hand drill to make a hole to pass a tiny blade into it. Her skull was cut open. It was very, very hard to cut through that bone. That's why it was a guy who did it. Rock wanted to masturbate into her brain.

—Gabrielle Lavallée

Then he told us to put the cover back on the coffin and now he wanted to practice things on us. He was talking about the lobotomy. He was frightful.

He scared me so much. Nobody was moving. Everybody was frozen.

He went two days without drinking and then he started again. I couldn't take it any more. I couldn't stand to see the horrors that he was doing on Rachel. Rock kept taking her out of the ground and operating on her, removing parts. She was starting to decompose. Rock had made her suffer in life and now he was making her suffer in death.

I went to the group to talk to them. Nobody else in the group would talk—they were afraid of being beaten. But I asked them if they had any ideas how they could stop Rock from doing these things to Rachel. I then recalled what Rachel's wishes were. She had confided in me that if she ever did die she wanted to be cremated. The group then decided that we would incinerate Rachel, and Rock agreed.

—Gisèle Tremblay

Before the cremation of the body, a rib was removed from it, which the accused wore in a leather casing upon his person. Each of the members of the group was given a piece of bone from the cremation site to have as a keepsake.

—Agreed statement of facts

He asked Gisèle and I to take a rib from her and to bring it to him because he wanted to keep one of her ribs. I'm the one that took the rib out. The knife that I used was buried near where she's burned.

—Gabrielle Lavallée

Rachel was incinerated the day that Rock left to go somewhere. He knew we were going to do it, but he did not want to be present. He told us that it was our responsibility. We made a crematorium. We

started to burn Rachel at 8. Everybody helped. She burned all that night.

—Gisèle Tremblay

When she was burning, we were singing songs. Her favorite songs. It started at sundown and it lasted the whole night.

—Gabrielle Lavallée

I know Rock had a jar of the bones. Myself, I had hidden a plastic container of her remains just behind where the body was burned.

—Jacques Giguère

I don't know how long after, perhaps the next day after she was burned, everybody came and Rock asked us to take a piece of Rachel's bones to make a necklace. Ruth [Chantal] was sitting on the table and she had the rest of the bones that were not burned properly. She and Deborah [Nicole] were cleaning those bones.

—Gabrielle Lavallée

Nobody spoke after the cremation, only Rock. Rock drank, threw knives and fired guns.

—Gisèle Tremblay

He took the most beautiful pieces of bones and put them in a jar full of olive oil, along with a picture of him and her. He was masturbating into that container regularly. I don't know if it was daily, but it was on a regular basis in front of his sanctuary and in his bedroom. He was sure that somehow, someday that would bring her back to life.

—Gabrielle Lavallée

CHAPTER 20

BORN IN THE USA



October had been a glorious, balmy month on the desert plateau where Big Water lay. But winter arrived quicker than a rattlesnake dodging a bullet, and by the time Rock rolled into town in a battered white van early one morning in the third week of November 1988, the red sands were being dusted by a light snow.

Rock was accompanied by a big-bellied Francine. But to Alex's chagrin, he had also brought four of his other wives—Nicole Ruel, Chantal Labrie, Marise Lambert and Gisèle Tremblay. The chief executive of Big Water immediately huddled with his nine wives to come up with a housing plan. They decided to clear out Alex's bedroom on the second floor of the main lodge and hand it over to the Canadians. By tradition, the patriarch's room had served as the maternity ward.

It wasn't at all like the last visit. Alex and his family didn't get a chance to mix much with "the Thériaults." Rock's wives were pleasant enough. But they tended to cluster together in the bedroom, where the five of them slept with Rock in one big heap. During the day, they cooked non-stop in the main hall's kitchen, chattering in French the whole

time. The only time they socialized with the Joseph clan was at mealtime, but even then the language barrier made conversation almost impossible.

Alex had hardly thought it possible, but Moses actually seemed weirder this time around. He would gaze into the air and talk about "compressed spirits," and he kept touching some kind of object under his clothing near his chest. Alex also couldn't help noticing that Esther wore a scarf over her head everywhere she went, day or night.

It looked as though Rock had packed all of his belongings into the rusting van, and he wasn't talking about returning to Canada. That worried Alex. When the American brought up the subject, Rock started to weep and whine. He said the government was harassing him again. A few months earlier, he'd placed an innocent phone call to one of the families looking after his children. Now Rock was facing some kind of trumped-up criminal charge. He was supposed to appear in court. But the authorities would never listen to his side of the story—never had. Maybe, Rock said, he shouldn't bother going back to Canada. They'd just throw him in jail anyway.

Alex heard the man out. As a spiritual adviser, as the father of a busload of kids and as a former policeman, he'd listened to a million hard luck stories. He offered Rock the same common-sense advice he always gave. If the government was telling Rock that he had to go to court, he couldn't just walk away. No government—not the Canadian parliament or the U.S. Congress—was going to let him establish a sovereign kingdom under its nose. If he hadn't committed a crime, why not hire a lawyer and get it straightened out? If he had, he should 'fess up and take whatever punishment was coming.

Finally, Alex told Rock that under no circum-

stances would he be allowed to hide out in Big Water as a fugitive. The last thing the Utah polygamist needed was that kind of heat.

Alex didn't know if his lecture had worked, but he had to prepare for eventualities. He turned his mind to the baby that Francine was about to have. If Rock did leave it behind, well, there was no question that the child would be accepted and cared for. But which of his wives would raise it? Alex talked to Margaret, the step-daughter of Rulon Allred, and asked her what she thought of taking the child. She already had five kids. "Yeah, fine. What's one more?" came the reply.

But Elizabeth, the lawyer, had other ideas. She, Joanna and Boudicca had been roommates before marrying Alex almost fifteen years ago. Since then, they'd all been trying to have children by him—without success. Being plural wives, it was impossible for them to adopt a child legally. Elizabeth herself had managed to find a way around the law and was about to receive a baby girl through a private arrangement. That would leave Joanna and Boudicca as the only wives without children. Elizabeth took it upon herself to ask Joanna if she was interested in adopting Francine's baby. Joanna's eyes lit up and she let out a big, "Yaaaa." That seemed to settle that—although Elizabeth still fretted about what Boudicca would think.

She wouldn't have to worry about it for long.

While Rock's wives bustled around the kitchen cooking up vegetarian dishes, the Ant Hill "king" decided to play doctor again. One day, in a terrible panic, he burst into Dawn's and Diana's quarters, where Alex was staying. He rushed up to Alex, clasped his host's arms and looked at him gravely.

"Alex, Alex—you've got to have heart surgery," he announced with the urgency of a fireman trying

to stop a potential suicide from jumping off a building.

"Whaddaya talkin' about, Rock?" Alex drawled.

"I've been studying your medical charts and you have a terminal heart problem. If you don't let me operate I can't promise that you'll make it through the night."

Being a chain smoker, Alex knew that he was prone to that kind of ailment. But the last thing he was going to do was let the bearded kook standing in front of him meddle with his ticker. Alex politely declined Rock's offer of free surgery.

But then Rock insisted that Alex let him provide another special treatment, a very expensive and exclusive heart therapy that was known only to the best doctors in Europe. This one wouldn't require any incisions.

"So he comes and does this body massage," Alex recalled. "It involved putting pressure on my chest and arms and legs. And this guy is really good—I mean, *good.* You would pay fifty bucks for this massage, no question about it. I would've hired him just to give me weekly massages. As a matter of fact, I even coughed up this kind of brown residue. When he was all done, he did something very funny, just like a carnival guy. He leans over and says, 'Now isn't that worth an extra five bucks—how about a little tip?' He did it so cleverly, I remember thinking to myself, this guy has worked as a con."

Alex's wife Boudicca was pleased with the results, too. After fifteen years of trying, Alex got her pregnant a few days later. She attributed the breakthrough to the magic of Rock's massage.



In the early morning of November 22, Francine went into labor. That night, Alex was sleeping with

Elizabeth in her house across the street. At 9:30 a.m., Rock awakened them by barging into the bedroom, practically knocking the door off its hinges, and waggling the newborn in their faces, blood dripping from his hands and from the unwashed infant. Elizabeth was perturbed because Rock had bloodied her sheets and blankets while he was waving the baby around. She also thought it was a bit ridiculous for a man who was a father twenty-two times over to be acting like a complete nut just because one of his wives had given birth again.

Rock insisted that everyone gather in Alex's bedroom that afternoon for a big ceremony. He put on his best Shakespearean stage voice, and talked on and on about what a miracle it was that God had given him another son. Then he christened the infant Solomon Joseph Thériault.

The real celebration came on Friday. It was the beginning of the American Thanksgiving weekend, a time when Alex customarily put on a big feast for his family and dozens of friends. But this year would be special. A television crew from the CBC public affairs program *the fifth estate* was flying in from Toronto to do some filming for a documentary on polygamy. Alex thought it would be a nice fit, seeing as he had Canadian guests down for the week.

Instead, the dinner turned into a nasty affair. The CBC producer, Gordon Stewart, pulled Alex aside and whispered that Rock Thériault had a bad reputation back in Canada, dating back several years to the mysterious death of a two-year-old in Quebec. He advised Alex to seat Rock and his wives at a separate table for the meal so that his footage of the happy Big Water compound wouldn't be tainted by the freaks from Burnt River. Alex agreed, but he, Elizabeth and the other Joseph wives were quite em-

barrassed. It went against their desert hospitality. Their Canadian friends were admittedly a little odd, but they didn't seem like criminals.

The morning after, Elizabeth started to get the picture.

Rock asked her for an appointment on the pretext that he needed advice on an estate matter. The two went into Elizabeth's office at the compound, and Rock sought her assurance that their conversation would be protected by attorney-client privilege. He started by telling her a wild story about a shipwreck in a tributary of the St. Lawrence River some two thousand years ago. His father or his grandfather had salvaged the wreck. Somehow, this was all tied in with the fact that Rock's family had squatter's rights to a large tract of land in Quebec. He needed legal help to get the property, which was very valuable.

Elizabeth could barely keep track of Rock's long-winded tale. Just when she thought she had a handle on things, he changed the subject and began to speak about Rachel's death. In a matter-of-fact tone, Rock explained in minute detail how he and his wives had buried the body. Next, he gave a point-by-point account of all of the things they'd done to the corpse. He told how he had taken one of Rachel's ribs and sewn it to his chest. When the stitched flesh became infected, he had removed the bone, wrapped it in leather and tied a chain to each end to make a necklace. He was wearing it that very moment. All of these things, he assured her, were magic rituals designed to generate spiritual power.

What struck Elizabeth was that Rock was explaining all of this as though he was describing the driest legal contract ever written. As a lawyer, she was trained not to jump when a client came in and confessed to a horrible crime. But she felt weak-

kneed and unable to absorb Rock's story. She also found it hard to believe that Rock's wives, who looked so normal, could have participated in such grotesque acts.

The same day, Alex started to hear similar tales from Rock.

At first I had the image that he'd made a coffin for his wife and performed his own funeral service, which he is perfectly capable of doing. But I find out that he's not doing any of the civilized things. He's at home playing with this dead body—which is unacceptable and against the law. I guess it's not a serious crime to mess around with a body, but it's really lousy taste, and you've got to have a stomach for it. I got concerned about the people who were still alive and the babies who were yet to be born. I mean this guy was wackier than a wooden watch.

He's telling me this thing about the rib, and you hope you're not hearing what you think you're hearing. He's actually got this piece of bone in his possession. And he's got this souvenir, a leather pouch with other bones in it. Is that legal up in Canada? I kind of thought I was being put on. Like, what's the name of this game? His approach to me was, "Now that I've done all these things for this woman, have I left anything out? Have you got any suggestions? Should I go up there and tie her to a pole and dance around her—did I forget to do that?" That was kind of his attitude. And I'm looking at him, aghast. I'm telling him, "You've got to leave this woman alone."

I couldn't really imagine what was going on up there in Canada. Whatever happened took

place outside of our knowledge—but not outside of the knowledge of five nice, friendly women who were sitting in front of us. And this is what really blows my mind. If he did these things, and they know that, then we can't be looking at what we're seeing—people sitting around the dinner table and saying, "Dear, would you pass the butter please?"

Alex talked to Elizabeth, who was hankering to get rid of Rock as fast as possible. But she didn't want to alienate him because she was praying that the Thériaults would leave their new baby with Joanna. The problem was, Rock had driven his five wives four thousand kilometers in a rickety van to the middle of the great American desert and not brought enough money to get them back home. And now he was talking about sending his women out to beg for money so he could stay in Utah. Alex had another talk with Rock and convinced him that it would be best if he left. As part of the deal, Alex agreed to cash two of Rock's cheques for a total of eight hundred dollars (both bounced).

Finally, Rock announced that he was taking his wives back to Canada and leaving his son behind. While Alex, Elizabeth and Margaret were in the office debating who should raise the child, Rock and his family took Joanna out to a bar to ask if she wanted to take care of it. Everyone seemed satisfied.

That afternoon Rock started to drink. He seemed to forget all about Rachel and her rebirth, and there was no more talk about spirituality or religion. "He just turned into a run-of-the-mill asshole who'd

have everyone wanting to kick his butt if he walked into a bar," said Alex.

Some time after supper, Elizabeth got word that Rock was about to pull a tooth that was causing Diana trouble. Given what she'd learned in her office about Rock, the thought filled her with dread. By the time she found Diana, she was lying on the bathroom floor at Margaret's place sicker than she'd ever been in her life. To anesthetize her, Rock had mixed a concoction of various types of liquor and told her to drink several ounces of it. Diana couldn't even stand up. Two of Alex's sons had to come by and carry her to her room.

Meanwhile, Rock had gone to Alex's office. Holding court with his five wives, he was getting more plastered by the hour. Alex was there, too, and Rock wanted to have some kind of macho contest. He challenged his host to take his pants off. When Alex refused, Rock whipped down his drawers.

After Rock finished showing off his "magic wand," he wanted to put on another demonstration for Alex.

"Mamy, come here," he jeered in French. "I want you to show Alex your nice haircut."

Gisèle was horrified. She'd kept a scarf over her head all week to hide her mutilated scalp, and she didn't want to be humiliated in front of Alex.

"No," she said in English, trying to sound firm. "I . . . don't . . . want."

Rock reached over and yanked the scarf off her shaved head. Gisèle buried her face in her hands and began sobbing. The rest of Rock's wives cowered in a corner.

"How did that happen?" Alex asked. "It looks like you fell down some stairs."

Gisèle was too afraid to reveal the truth. "*Pense*

ce que tu veux," she answered in French. Think what you like.

Alex was sure that she'd said something about Rock and how it was all an accident. He thought to himself that maybe Gisèle should start hanging around with someone who wasn't so accident-prone.

Rock was having a riot. Next, he barked at Gisèle in French to lower her pants.

"No," she said again.

"Come on, show Alex the scars on your leg and tummy."

"Okay, you want to see them?" she cried, tears streaming down her face.

After complying with Rock's request, she muttered that he was a cruel and evil man. As soon as Rock heard that, he slugged his wife in the face.

"See, Alex?" he cracked. "If you want to learn how to teach them, stick with me."

He was expecting Alex to laugh approvingly. Instead, the ex-marine came face to face with Rock, picked him up by the groin, and threw him into a chair in the corner of the office.

"Don't move," he shouted at Rock, jabbing his finger at him. "We don't treat women that way around my place."

Gisèle thought she saw Alex push a button on his desk. Within moments, two men rushed into the room wearing pistols. Rock was a pathetic sight, sitting in the chair whimpering.

"He was startled," recalled Alex. "I hurt him really bad and he thought I was going to kill him. His eyes were just bugging out of his head. He's starin' at me like, 'Tell me what you want and I'll do it.' "

While the other wives stared in stunned silence, Gisèle seized the opportunity to run downstairs and

into the desert, where she slept all night in some sagebrush. In the morning she crept back and encountered Elizabeth, who took her into her house. Gisèle was a nervous wreck. Elizabeth told her to stay put because Rock had been up all night on a drunken rampage. Alex had stayed up until 5 a.m. to keep watch over him, then asked his teenaged son James to take over.

Elizabeth hid Gisèle in her bedroom and went outside to investigate. She saw Rock running out into the desert screaming wildly. She thought he was carrying something—the baby?—and sent James out after him. But it became clear it was a false alarm when a few minutes later Francine came out of the main building. "She walks up to us all tearful," Elizabeth recalled, "and says, 'Rock told me I have to get my baby.' After having given the child to Joanna, Rock had ordered her to come and take it back. Well, she didn't get it."

For the rest of the day, Rock behaved like a complete lunatic. Gisèle and Alex's wives stayed inside and locked their doors. Rock was too drunk to know where Gisèle had gone, but he got it into his head that Alex had kidnapped her. He stumbled up to him and threatened to kill him. Alex looked at him with an expression somewhere between concern and amusement.

"All day long people were talking to Rock out on the street because he was half undressed, and he was trying to get all the way undressed," Elizabeth said. "They wouldn't let him, but he kept parading up and down the lane half nude trying to take the rest of his clothes off. Nobody would go to the hall for dinner that night because finally he did manage to get completely naked. It wasn't like we thought he'd hurt us, as much as we didn't want to have to

look at his penis. Come to think of it, he was always trying to take it out of his pants."

By nightfall, Rock passed out, bringing his two-day binge to an end. Alex took the opportunity to have one last session with his now-sober visitor. He repeated to Rock that he would have to live up to his Christian obligations to his family. But Rock didn't seem to be paying attention. He told Alex that he had developed a malignancy in his intestines and that it would kill him in three days.

At supper-time the Canadians packed up their things and left.

Alex and his wives walked around with big, relieved smiles for the rest of the evening. They'd now seen Rock for the monster he was. But they couldn't argue with Providence: the fact was, Joanna now had a baby.

CHAPTER 21

SAVAGE MESSIAH



It is not pleasure which you want to make your partner feel but impression you want to produce; that of pain is far stronger than that of pleasure. . . . One realizes that; one uses it and is satisfied.

—Marquis de Sade

The confrontation between Rock and Alex in Big Water was a turning point for Gisèle. For the first time since she'd met him by a dance floor in Quebec City twelve years earlier, someone had stood up to Rock and prevailed. It taught her that Rock might be an emissary of God, but there was a definite limit to his powers. It was possible to defy him and go on living.

The trip to Utah had shown her something else, too. Rock had always maintained that the Old Testament commanded wives to be totally submissive to their husbands. But Alex claimed to live by the Old Testament, too, and *he* gave his wives a great deal of freedom. They could have their own jobs, maintain their own bank accounts and come and go as they pleased. When they wanted to have sex with their husband, all they had to do was walk over to Alex's quarters and make an appointment. As far as Gisèle could tell, they even had the right to say no.

She never once saw Alex hit his women, shoot at them or throw them into the lake. He didn't even insult them or call them bad names.

Most important of all, Gisèle couldn't stop thinking about Solange's death. She was appalled by Rock's mutilation of the body. And she was convinced that her own life was in serious danger.

Gisèle desperately wanted to leave, but she still felt trapped and helpless. Like many battered wives, she had spent too long denying the reality of her circumstances. For years she had told herself that if she stayed with Rock, she could make him a better man. Now she knew that no one could help him, but the group was the only existence she'd known for a dozen years. Every significant decision in her life had been made by someone else—what time she woke up in the morning, when and how much she ate, even what she had been allowed to say to her own son before the Children's Aid Society had taken him away. It was as though she had forgotten how to act for herself. She couldn't imagine what kind of life she could have outside the group.

All that winter, Gisèle bounced back and forth like a tennis ball from Burnt River to her parents' home in St.-Joseph-de-la-Rive. She found herself incapable of remaining in Rock's presence for more than a few weeks at a time, yet whenever she left she felt a tremendous void.

Some of the other wives were also having doubts about their master. Marise took off several times to her mother's house in Plessisville, showing up one time with a pair of black eyes. But just like Gisèle she came marching back obediently every time Rock reached her on the phone. "When I heard his voice I'd fall back into line. I'd be right back on the path."

Unfortunately for Rock's followers, the constant

comings and goings from the commune only seemed to amplify his rage. Hardly a week went by without another demented outburst against his ungrateful wives. He would scream at the top of his lungs, cursing Satan for sentencing him to live with such "disloyal and wicked women." At night he sat up naked for hours in his bedroom, guzzling beer and scribbling madly in his diary by candlelight.

> **Nothing or no one will ever be able to make me suffer again and cause me pain in my body. Not my women, not my children, not my friends, not Mister Everybody or the pretty and grandiose Lucifer with the large Vagina who gave birth to millions and millions of demons. I curse her with all the strength of my heart. She and her bitch, early posterity.**



At times like that, every one of the commune members was at risk of being beaten and tortured. None suffered more after Solange's death than Gabrielle. In Rock's eyes, she was a mouthy, arrogant she-devil who liked to be the center of attention and acted as though she was better than the others. In short, she represented a threat to his dominance. Marise Lambert complained that Gabrielle "liked to take up space, liked to be important." In addition, she was the only wife who spoke English passably, and as a result had the greatest amount of contact with the world beyond the commune's boundaries. More than once she had turned up on a neighbor's doorstep with a black eye or a knife wound. Although she never disclosed the full extent of Rock's atrocities, she often hinted to others that he wasn't quite the gentle shepherd that he made himself out to be.

One such occasion was in October 1986. The commune leader had hired out several of his followers to pick cabbages on a farm in Argyle, Ontario. Ever since her pregnancy, Gabrielle had been suffering from a prolapsed uterus. The constant hard manual labor only made it worse, until finally her uterus was protruding a full three inches from her vagina. Hunched over in the fields, Gabrielle was in extreme discomfort. But Rock kept refusing to let her see a doctor, claiming that he knew better. "He wanted to fix it himself," she said. "So one night he forced everyone to put me on the table. And then he punched the uterus and tried to force it right back in." That same night, he carved a cone-shaped piece of wood, jammed it into her vagina and attached a harness to her waist to keep it from falling out.

When day broke, cold and wet, Rock ordered Gabrielle to join the others and continue picking vegetables. On the way to the fields she removed the contraption that Rock had installed. That evening, afraid to return to the commune, she slipped away from the rest of the group and ran to the nearest neighbors, Marsh and Goldie Dudman. She told Goldie about the problem with her uterus and how she wasn't allowed to go to the hospital. Then she described what had happened the previous night—how Rock had tried to pound the organ back inside with his fist. The pain, she said, was unbearable. (Another time, Gisèle ran to the Dudmans' house covered in burrs and filthy from running through the swamp. Shaking and crying, she explained that Rock was drinking heavily, chasing her into the bush and beating her up. As in Gabrielle's case, the Dudmans did what they could to help but neglected to mention anything to the police. "We didn't see any hint of violence, ever," Marsh Dudman told the

Toronto Sun years later. "You know, there was a lot of love in that family—a lot of love.")

Gabrielle spent that night at a women's shelter in Fenelon Falls, telling staff that she had problems with her uterus but that Rock wouldn't leave her alone sexually. She talked about going to the hospital the next day.

Instead, it was a full twelve months before Gabrielle obtained medical treatment. At one point during that year, Rock made another unsuccessful attempt to "cure" Gabrielle by tying a string around the exposed portion of the uterus and yanking at it. Needless to say, it only magnified the pain.

Finally, during Rock's first trip to Utah in 1987, Gabrielle surreptitiously checked into Lindsay's Ross Memorial Hospital. A doctor there performed a partial hysterectomy.

But that wasn't the end of the episode. Although the Dudmans did not tell outsiders about the things they had heard and seen, they did go to Rock to complain about his treatment of his wives. It only made matters worse. Rock never forgave Gabrielle for her indiscretion. He was fed up with her for always trying to be the center of attention, especially among strangers. If she kept it up, her stupidity would soon land him in trouble again with the law. A month after Solange's death in the fall of 1988, Rock accused her of betrayal and vowed to teach her a lesson.

That night, Gabrielle had been complaining of a toothache. "You know, Gabrielle," he snarled, "you've always had a big mouth. Well, this will shut your mouth for good." He grabbed a pair of pliers, pried open her mouth with his hands and ripped eight healthy teeth from her lower jaw, leaving her gums bloody and shredded. "He was drunk," she recalled. "He was absolutely crazy. He was pull-

ing out pieces of my jawbone with the teeth." In his frenzy, he didn't even touch the infected tooth.

As Gabrielle reeled in agony, blood pouring from her mouth, Rock pulled a hunting knife from the sheath on his belt and began to chase her around the room, threatening to stab her in the stomach. Gabrielle grabbed the knife to protect herself, and in the struggle the blade sliced two of the tendons in her right hand. Then she ran off into the night, terrified that if she stayed, the self-taught surgeon would decide to operate again.

Two days later, she showed up at a women's shelter in Peterborough with the right side of her face severely swollen, scratches on her lips and neck and deep cuts on her right hand. Explaining that her boyfriend had punched her in the jaw, she lived in the shelter for the next three weeks while dental surgeons stitched her mouth and doctors installed wires in her hand in place of the severed tendons. After the surgery, they put her hand in a cast and told her that she would require two months of physiotherapy. Because of the shelter's policy of not calling the police without a resident's consent, Gabrielle's injuries went unreported.

One day in early December, Rock climbed into the commune's van and began a search for his missing wife. Among the first places he checked was the women's shelter, remembering that Gisèle had hidden out there earlier. When the staff told Gabrielle that Rock had come for her, she immediately agreed to see him. He cried and begged her to come back, promising to quit drinking. "He made me feel guilty —that the problems were caused by me," she said later. "I walked away. He rolls down the window and says, 'Okay. It is over.' I said, 'No, not like this.' "

Overcome by grief, Gabrielle returned to the com-

mune. She felt almost a gravitational pull toward Rock, a force beyond her own comprehension. As with every tormented soul, the key to her psyche lay buried in the past. Living with a dominant, violently abusive man was not something she had ever consciously desired, but it was the only kind of world she understood. On a subconscious level she had chosen a mate whose behavior echoed that of the sadistic brutes who had raped her as a young girl. Rock was like those men—he was the devil she knew. The terrible shame and inadequacy she had internalized in early life kept driving her back toward new suffering.

It wasn't long before Rock returned to his familiar self. After a night of drinking, he began to complain about the incompetence of the doctors who had treated Gabrielle. Soon he worked himself into a rage and ordered her to hold out her arm. He ripped off the cast and inspected the repaired hand while Gabrielle turned white with fear. "There's no way that wiring job is going to work," he ranted. He grabbed the pliers, peeled back the skin and tore the wires out of her hand. She fled again in terror.

In spite of the ghastly injuries, the hand eventually healed except for some stiffness in the baby finger. Unable to resist Rock's pull, Gabrielle once again returned to the commune, arriving in time for a visit by the group to Thériault's parents in Thetford Mines in early January.

Not long after that, Jean-Marc Martin, the canoe builder whose car Rock had rammed in the summer of 1988, got into a conversation with Gabrielle. He asked if it was true that Rock had yanked out eight of her teeth.

When Gabrielle admitted that it was, Martin demanded to know why the hell she didn't leave the son of a bitch—he was obviously dangerous.

"He's alcoholic," she replied. "But I love him, and I know that if I stay I can cure him."



Solange had been dead for six months, but still neither the authorities nor her family knew anything about Rock's "operation" and the awful consequences. In mid-March of 1989, staff at the Children's Aid Society heard a rumor that yet another baby had been born at the commune. If true, they calculated, it would bring Rock's lifetime total to twenty-three. One of the social workers, Stan Pope, got a search warrant to investigate and went to the Burnt River site with two other CAS employees and a couple of police officers.

The rumor proved to be false. But just as the visitors were getting ready to leave, Pope turned to one of the cops and remarked that one of the wives, Solange Boilard, seemed to be missing, The two cops tracked Rock down in the forest where he was cutting wood with Jacques. He quickly explained that Solange had gone to a "safe house" in Aurora, just north of Toronto, to give birth. If the government wanted any more details, the police would have to call his lawyer.

The police reported the results of the encounter to the CAS, and Pope promised to get a court order forcing Rock to produce the baby. As far as the police were concerned that was the end of the matter.

Back in Quebec, Gisèle Martineau was wondering when she was going to hear again from her sister. One day later that spring, she ran into Francine Laflamme's mother in a Plessisville clothing store. Madame Laflamme exclaimed that her daughter was at home for a visit, and she invited Martineau to drop by. Hoping to find out how Solange was doing, Martineau hurried over to the house. When she

arrived, Francine smiled pleasantly and assured her that everything was fine. Little did Martineau know that Francine was carrying around one of her dead sister's bones.



The evening of July 26 was almost like old times at the Burnt River commune. All that spring and summer, one commune member after another had run away to Quebec, lying low until the cuts and bruises healed and it appeared safe to return. With the exception of Josée, who had gone back to her mother's home near Plessisville for good, the entire group was back together. There were also two babies that Rock had managed to conceal from the CAS—one born to Marise in early May, and a nine-day-old infant born to Chantal. It was a time for celebration, and Rock was doing it in his usual style. As he became more intoxicated, he started boasting about his wealth and his surgical skills. It was a sure sign that blood would soon flow. Gisèle snuck out the door and made for the bush, with Claude, Francine and Marise not far behind.

The trouble began when Rock motioned Gabrielle over to the kitchen area so that he could check on her stiff baby finger. He asked her to place her right hand on the corner of the table. Without another word, Rock spun around and drove a hunting knife through the back of her hand, impaling it on the table.

"You're not going to run tonight, ah?" he said, smirking maniacally.

The pain was excruciating, but the knife was embedded so deeply that Gabrielle couldn't budge it. She shuddered and answered weakly, "I guess not."

Laughing, Rock grabbed another beer and dumped himself in a chair. Gabrielle didn't dare sit down

because she was afraid she would lose consciousness. She was sure that if she passed out, she would suffer the same fate as Solange. She stood there, transfixed, while blood spurted out of the punctured flesh, formed a thick pool on the tabletop and trickled down the wooden leg to the floor.

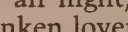
After forty-five minutes, Rock stumbled over to have another look. Gabrielle's entire arm had turned a sickly shade of blue. She prayed that he would show mercy on her.

He leaned on the table and stared at the crucified hand. After a while he turned and gazed at her arm. "Well, well, look at this," he muttered finally. "It's not looking so good, is it?"

Rock fished a small, curved carpet knife out of a toolbox and ran his thumb along the edge to check that it was sharp. Gabrielle winced and jerked in pain as her master jabbed the pointed tip into her right arm, halfway between the shoulder and elbow. Gripping her shoulder with one hand to keep her still, he began methodically carving out small chunks of flesh, flicking them on the floor like a woodcarver discarding chips of wood. While Jacques, Nicole and Chantal looked on, he gradually worked his way toward the bone, digging into the bloody flesh and slicing through tendons. Gabrielle was certain she would faint, but through sheer force of will somehow managed to stay conscious. Rock, however, was too drunk to complete the job, so he called Chantal over and asked her to carry on where he'd left off. Soon all three of them were soaked in Gabrielle's blood. Following his careful instructions, Chantal cut and scraped until she had removed a narrow band of flesh all the way around the arm, exposing the bone on all sides.

With his right hand, Rock seized the handle of the knife stuck in the table and wiggled it loose. The

blade was still sticking through Gabrielle's hand as he led her over to a stump and told her to kneel on the floor. He then placed the arm on top of the stump and called on Jacques to hold her down. Moses raised a dull cleaver high over his head and swung at the bone. He missed. On the second strike the arm tumbled to the floor. The process had taken several hours, but Gabrielle had not screamed once. She lay on the floor all night, writhing in hellish agony, while her drunken lover of eleven years, her savage messiah, slept soundly on the sofa.



The next morning, Claude carried the severed arm outside and burned it—the same way he had incinerated Jacques' two-year-old son in Quebec, Solange's kidneys and uterus and the Belgian workhorse Rock had flogged to death. After dunking Gabrielle's stump in a saline solution, Chantal stitched it up with twine. Two days later, Gisèle emerged from her hiding place in the bush. She found Gabrielle sprawled on the ground, holding her stump with her left arm. She smiled vacantly and said: "It's all over now, Mamy. Rock took care of everything. I'm going to be fine."

Gabrielle made no attempt to leave. The only time she came close to escaping was when she, Rock, Jacques, Chantal and Nicole went to Newmarket with the two babies to have them examined by a doctor who wouldn't know of their problems with the CAS. That night, they all went to dinner at a Chinese restaurant, the Bamboo Gardens. After a few beers, Rock started bragging to a waitress about his medical prowess, telling them that he had recently amputated an arm. The waitress didn't believe him, so he called Gabrielle over and made her pull up her sleeve and show off her stump with its

crude stitches. The public humiliation almost seemed to her a greater crime than the amputation itself. She waited for the first opportunity to escape, and ran out into the parking lot. She spent the night sleeping on the pavement behind a dumpster. Despite what they had seen and heard, none of the restaurant staff bothered to call the police.

At dawn, Gabrielle hobbled out to the road and flagged down a police cruiser. She refused to tell them what had happened to her, but accepted a ride to a local women's shelter.

All that day, at Rock's instructions, Jacques drove around Newmarket looking for any sign of Gabrielle. He finally went to the York Regional Police to report a missing woman. The officer on duty recognized the name and, without thinking, told Jacques where he could find her. Gabrielle immediately agreed to return to the commune.

Rock, meanwhile, was having doubts about Gabrielle's recuperation. Two days after her Newmarket foray, he announced that the remaining six inches of arm was rotting with gangrene. He pinned her between his legs and with a pair of scissors made three incisions in her stump. He also cut a two-inch chunk of flesh from her right breast, explaining that the procedure would help to "redirect the infection somewhere else." Then, for some unexplained reason, he whacked her on the top of her head with the blunt side of an ax, leaving a large gash. She fled into the bush and spent two nights sleeping on the ground. When she awoke on the second day, August 11, a swarm of insects had laid eggs in the open scalp wound.

Jacques finally found her that afternoon. She asked him if Rock had sobered up yet, if he had eaten. "Why don't you come and find out for yourself?" Jacques replied.

As soon as she walked through the door, Gabrielle knew she had made a terrible mistake. The kitchen table was littered with beer bottles. Rock was still drunk and he wanted to play doctor again. At the commune leader's instructions, Jacques fired up the acetylene torch and cut a three-inch section of driveshaft from one of the junked vehicles out in the yard. Next, Rock ordered Jacques to wheel the welding equipment into the kitchen, while Chantal and Nicole cleared a space on the floor. They stripped Gabrielle and tied her left arm to her ankles. While the others held her down, Rock clamped the solid chunk of metal in a wrench and heated it in the flame until it glowed a fierce red. Gabrielle's body convulsed violently as the commune leader jammed the fiery implement against her stump, filling the air with the stench of sizzling flesh. He was so drunk that the heavy piece of cast iron kept slipping from the wrench and landing on Gabrielle's body. By the time Rock finished, there were black burn marks all over the wooden floor and Gabrielle's naked torso was covered with raw, stinging welts.



Three days later, on August 14, Gabrielle gathered up the strength to escape from the commune for the last time. The macabre events of the past three weeks had finally shattered her dependence on Rock. She grabbed some clean clothes and staggered through the forest to the road. Then she hitchhiked a ride to the same women's shelter in Newmarket where she had gone after the incident in the Chinese restaurant a week earlier.

At 10:40 on the morning on August 16, she showed up in the emergency department of York County Hospital. Fear, confusion and a perverse

sense of loyalty prompted her to cook up a story that might explain her condition: her boyfriend had rolled a car and her arm had been crushed between the wrecked vehicle and a tree. While she was unconscious, he had amputated the limb to save her life. Then he stitched up the wound and cauterized it so it wouldn't get infected. The attending physician took one glance at the charred stump and called the police. Two constables from the York Regional Police arrived to interview her that afternoon, but Gabrielle stuck to her story.

The next day, the case was turned over to Bob Bowen, a constable in the Coboconk detachment of the Ontario Provincial Police. He immediately concluded, as had the York Regional cops, that Gabrielle was lying. And even if what she said *was* true, it was illegal for someone without a medical license to sever a person's arm—especially when they were only twenty-five kilometers from a hospital. The OPP constable laid a charge of aggravated assault against Rock. The next day, August 19, he executed a search warrant at the commune property, finding it abandoned. He left with a doctor's bag, several bloody Kleenexes, a pair of scissors with bloodstains and a collection of sharp tools found in the main house and a nearby shed. He also checked the commune's battered vehicles for any evidence of flesh or blood. There was none.

What Bowen did not know was that the wanted man, together with Jacques Giguère, Chantal Labrie, Nicole Ruel and the two babies, had blithely driven off to Quebec the day before to deliver a load of freshly baked Ant Hill Kids bread.

The others had fled, and they weren't coming back. Claude, who had been a virtual zombie for twelve years, screwed up the courage to write Rock

a letter announcing that he was cutting his ties with him and the remainder of his group.

Gisèle wrote, too, from Orillia.

Dear Moses,

The time has come to separate me from you. We have spent too long hurting each other. . . .

My fear of you is at its end. There are too many horrible things that have happened these last times. This can't go on. I am very, very troubled by your actions while drunk. I can no longer see in you the Man of God, nor any tenderness, nor any peace. And the more you continue, the more you seek the blood of your people.

There is something that scares me about you. You don't want to stop drinking at all, and you find all kinds of pretexts to satisfy your thirst and your temper and your actions.

I thank your Master for having put you on my road. Forgive me for all the disloyalties which I made you suffer. I don't want to hurt you anymore.

Thank you for loving me—you, such a great and wise man.

Thank you for the children which I carried.

Thank you for living your life.

Esther

CHAPTER 22

THE ART OF THE DEAL



When Bob Bowen wanted to paint a picture of someone as a big, heavy-set man, he'd jokingly describe the person as "a mountain with eyes." The label applied equally well to himself. He stood six-foot-one but appeared even taller in his thick-soled police shoes and the baseball-style caps that he often wore—he seemed to own dozens of them—to conceal his balding head.

But Bowen's imposing stature was at odds with his unassuming manner. At forty-eight, he spoke with the soothing, reassuring tone of a Grade Four teacher addressing his pupils. On the job he affected a hangdog expression, rather like a white-bread Detective Columbo, that sometimes led suspects to think that he was half-asleep. But his colleagues said of Bowen that he had the memory of a sponge. If you needed to coax information out of a reluctant witness, you could do no better than to send in Bob. His placid, low-key exterior hid a quick mind and a sixth sense that alerted him to when someone was playing fast and loose with the truth. He also had an air of moral forthrightness that could make people

feel guilty even when they had done nothing wrong. It wasn't just an act. He'd always been burdened with a strict conscience, even as a young boy growing up in Cornwall, Ontario.

From there, Bowen joined the Ontario Provincial Police. He was twenty-four when the force sent him to the small town of Coboconk for his first posting. He has been there ever since.

In Coboconk, Bowen quickly earned a reputation as a clever investigator. But his colleagues constantly kidded him about his lack of patience. If he made an appointment to meet someone at 9 a.m., he would wait until 9:05 and, if they hadn't shown up yet, he would leave.

The search for Rock Thériault tested Bowen's patience in a more serious way. More than six weeks passed between Bowen's first visit to the commune on August 19, 1989, and when he finally apprehended the fugitive. The long, drawn-out manhunt was frustrating enough for a cop with a short fuse, but what made it worse were the snide comments around town, and in the Toronto papers, that the OPP didn't seem to know what it was doing. There were even wild rumors in the surrounding cottage country that a madman was loose in the woods, armed with a chainsaw.

One problem was that no one outside Rock's tight circle yet understood the seriousness of his offenses. As far as Bowen and his team were concerned, they were looking for a backwoods religious nut who had lost his temper while in a drunken stupor, broken a woman's arm and then performed some ill-advised field surgery. That, after all, was the story given by the victim, Gabrielle Lavallée.

On top of that, the cops didn't have a clue where to start looking. Early on there was a reported sighting of several adults driving into the camp in a

white van, and then fleeing on foot. But then the trail went cold. They knew from Gabrielle that Rock had contacts all over Ontario and Quebec, as well as several friends in the U.S. Perhaps he had left the province or even the country. Even if Rock was still in the area there were thousands of acres of dense bush and swampland in which a skilled woodsman could hide.

Bowen requested a police helicopter to make passes over the area. But it almost seemed futile. How much cunning did it take to hide under a tree? Another idea was to outfit the chopper with heat sensors, but they would pick up every bear, deer and porcupine. Bowen knew it would take an army on the ground to check out every sign of life. As it was, he barely had enough officers to make regular inspections of the commune. A twenty-four-hour stakeout was out of the question. For that kind of manpower he would need to be investigating a murder. The cops did ask Gabrielle several times if Rock had committed more serious crimes, but she said no. She did, however, provide a more complete account of the arm-hacking and cauterization, prompting the OPP to issue arrest warrants for Rock's three accomplices—Jacques, Chantal and Nicole.

The first clue that Rock was still in the neighborhood came when Bowen, on one of his daily inspections of the commune, noticed that furniture and other items had been shifted or were missing. He and his men set up nylon trip wires two inches off the floor inside the doorways. When they went back a day later, they saw that the lines were unbroken—but that someone had installed a second set of trip wires in each of the main buildings. They assumed it was Rock, thumbing his nose at them. Bowen took a map and divided the area into a grid, as-

signing men to search each section. All through August and September they tramped through the bush, finding nothing. The OPP constable also enlisted the help of a professional guide who had spent years hunting bears in the forests around Rock's compound. The tracker knew the area better than anyone, but even he came up empty.

All that time, Rock was hiding a mere half-a-mile from the commune with Jacques, Nicole, Chantal and the two babies. They lived in a lean-to at first, while the two men ingeniously built a small log cabin using handsaws so they wouldn't attract attention from the police. Inside was a small, rusty woodstove, a pile of dirty sleeping bags and food supplies which they occasionally took from the commune root cellar. For a toilet, they were using a hollowed-out stump. It was primitive, but Rock figured they could hide out there during the winter, until the police gave up and left them alone. With small garden tools, Jacques and Nicole were already digging the foundation for a new, larger cabin.

Bowen was still carrying on the manhunt when Gord Manktelow, the welfare case worker, phoned with the news that Gisèle Tremblay, Rock's legal wife, had left him and was living in Orillia. She was an emotional wreck, Manktelow said, but he was spending a lot of time with her and was hopeful she would eventually open up. One thing she was willing to talk about was the chopping off of Gabrielle's arm—Manktelow was pretty sure she could be coaxed into giving evidence. On the evening of September 30, Bowen took Gabrielle to Orillia in an unmarked cruiser to meet Gisèle and Manktelow. The four sat in the car while Bowen asked questions and took notes. To Bowen's surprise, the two women discussed Rock's domination of the group as though it was almost normal.

Finally, Bowen got frustrated. "I don't understand what the hell's going on," he said. If they didn't like it, he asked the women, why didn't they just leave?

Before Gisèle could answer, Manktelow cut in. "They're programed, Bob—they're brainwashed!"

Gabrielle swung around in the front passenger seat and glared at him icily. Manktelow thought for half-a-second that she was going to slug him.

"I'm not brainwashed," she hissed. "I don't got the program!"

Bowen looked at Gabrielle and then at Manktelow. Then he laughed. "Gee, Gord, I think you touched a raw nerve there."



The next time Bowen and Manktelow met was on October 5. Although Rock was still on the loose, Manktelow had suggested that the two men pay a visit to the commune in a police four-by-four to retrieve some toy stuffed animals that Gisèle and Gabrielle had left behind. It wasn't much, but the two women had lost just about everything else in their lives, including their children. Now they were all alone. Manktelow figured that the keepsakes would help the women to relax and sleep better at night. He couldn't imagine the torment they were going through. Gisèle kept talking about her eldest son, wondering if she would ever see him again. Both of the women were having nightmares so hellish that they were afraid to go to bed at night.

It was twilight when the huge vehicle lumbered up to the cabins. Suddenly Bowen blurted out, "There they are! Jesus Christ, it's them." He yanked his pistol out of the holster and scrambled out of the truck before it stopped rolling. It was Rock and Jacques, scavenging parts from an old water heater. Bowen and Manktelow chased the two fugitives to

the edge of a wooded area. In the excitement, Rock shouted something in French and Jacques spun around, placing himself between Bowen and the prime suspect like a sacrificial lamb. The two men put the cuffs on Jacques, but Rock had vanished.

Within an hour, OPP constables were crawling all over the site, but there was no trace of him.

When Manktelow spoke to Gisèle that night, he was expecting her to be upset by the news of Jacques' arrest. But instead she sounded delighted. "You catch Jacques?" she said. "Oh, thank you. He'll be happy now. He gets the food, he gets the sleep. He'll thank you very much, I'm sure."

At seven the next morning, Bowen was back at the commune with a huge search team and a tracking dog. They wanted to get an early start before the sun burned off the scent. Around noon, Bowen and another officer spied Rock through the bush, crouching by some trees. Slipping their revolvers out of their holsters, they crept forward silently. When they had a clear line of fire, Bowen's partner shouted out, "Rock, police. Don't move." Only then did they notice the cabin nearby. It was so well camouflaged that even from a distance of ten meters it was easy to miss. Chantal and Nicole were standing by passively with the two babies, who were wearing green garbage bags for diapers.

It was the first time Bowen had ever been face to face with Rock. He was wearing a sleeveless vest open to expose his hairy chest and stomach, grubby work pants and a brown leather belt with a large bowie knife hanging off it. Keeping his snub-nosed .38 revolver trained on the suspect, Bowen ordered Rock to remove the knife and belt.

"Okay, but if my pants fall down when I take the belt off, you'll see that my eyes aren't the best part of me," Rock said, smirking. When Bowen asked

why he was hiding, the cult leader suddenly became serious again. "I was waiting here with my kids, playing with my kids. I thought you were coming to take my kids."



Although all but three of Rock's commune members had left, none had uttered a word about Solange's death to anyone. Finally, Gisèle mustered the courage. By sheer coincidence, it was on the day of Rock's arrest—Friday, October 6—that she invited Manktelow to her Orillia apartment. There, over a bottle of wine, she laid out the details of Solange's gruesome murder.

Manktelow was desperate to tell Bowen, but it was the start of the Thanksgiving weekend and the OPP constable was out of town. When Bowen returned on Monday, he picked up Gabrielle and visited the commune with a police video crew so they could record her statement on the amputation. For a full hour she led Bowen and the crew around the site, describing how Rock had pinned her to the table with a knife, chopped off her arm and, days later, cauterized the stump with a piece of red-hot iron. Never once did she even hint at the murder.

Manktelow finally reached Bowen at his home at 10:50 p.m. "Bob, there's a body in there," he exclaimed. He was almost in tears as he related the harrowing events Gisèle had described. Bowen told Manktelow to take Gisèle to the OPP detachment in Coboconk after dinner the next day so that they could videotape her statement. He would not be free earlier because Rock, Jacques, Nicole and Chantal were due to appear in Provincial Court in Lindsay for what was assumed would be a routine bail hearing.

To everyone's surprise, Rock and his followers en-

tered guilty pleas on all charges related to Gabrielle's loss of her arm. The duty counsel urged them to get a lawyer, but they were adamant. Rock drew a twelve-year prison term for three counts of aggravated assault and one of aggravated assault causing bodily harm. The others were convicted on one count each of aggravated assault. Jacques got five years, Chantal two years less a day and Nicole eighteen months.

"Your honor and members of this court," Rock said through a translator before his sentencing, "I didn't know everything because I was drunk. I know now. It's horrible—no excuse. I am guilty because I took the bottle. Nobody forced me to take it. I feel very sad about that."

Then Chantal spoke up. "I consider Rock my love, and I have always respected him."

"Outside of his drinking bouts," Nicole added, "he is a very good man."

Two days later, Rock agreed to meet a reporter from the *Lindsay Post* in the visitors' room of the local jail. By then, much of his contrition seemed to have evaporated. "I am not a savage," he said, adding that he had studied to be a medicine man in Arizona. "The arm was bad—she had an infection." He scoffed at the suggestion that he had brainwashed his followers. "If the prime minister of Canada or the mayor of Lindsay follows what people want, and people support him, are those people being hypnotized?"

Rock also had a ready explanation for his decision to plead guilty four days after his arrest without even hiring a lawyer. "To go for a trial it takes a long time and costs lots of money, and a lot of people—taxpayers—have to pay. The testimony of Gabrielle was substantially correct, and just to fight

for one word here or there might cost twenty thousand dollars."

It was a breathtakingly arrogant performance by a man who literally believed that he had got away with murder. Little did Rock know that Bowen was by now gathering evidence for a first-degree murder charge. After interviewing Gisèle, Bowen confronted Gabrielle—who was present for the operation on Solange and could have been charged as an accomplice—and demanded the truth. She opened up immediately. That weekend, she returned again to the commune with the police and provided a full, videotaped account of the murder, the repeated exhumations and defilement of the body, and the cremation.

With that, Bowen began an intensive search for Solange's remains. A team of pathologists made a grid over the cremation site and dug through the ashes on their hands and knees. But there was not much left—only enough bone fragments to fill a one-liter jar. At the same time, Bowen was collecting necklaces made of pieces of Solange's skeleton from Gabrielle, Chantal, Jacques, Gisèle, Josée and Marise.

On Sunday, October 15, Bowen went to the Lindsay jailhouse with a search warrant to recover the necklace Rock had made from Solange's rib. He couldn't help asking Rock why he had wanted such a thing.

"Because Solange was my beloved wife," Rock answered slowly, groping for the right explanation for a small-town police constable. "And I believe . . . in the Bible it said a woman came from the ribs of the man, and I said I want to keep part of my wife on me."

Bowen heard him out and then announced that he was going down to the jail's property room and tak-

ing the necklace away with him. Rock broke down sobbing.

"Can I go with you?" he pleaded.

"Eh?"

"Can I, can I go with you to give a kiss, a kiss to Solange one last time?"

The constable escorted Rock downstairs to the property room, where two custodians opened his locker and gingerly picked out the leather-bound necklace. Rock took it and asked permission to unwrap the bone. Bowen refused. As the jail staff stared in wide-eyed disbelief, Rock then brought the rib to his lips and kissed it, crying and wailing like a baby.

Bowen was also on the hunt for some of Solange's organs. Gabrielle had told him that the uterus was stored in a large mason jar which Rock kept in his forest sanctuary. But when the cops went to look for it, it had disappeared. They were convinced that one of Rock's "zombies" had paid a clandestine visit to the altar and made off with the jar.

On Tuesday, October 24, exactly two weeks after Rock had tried to shut down any further investigation by confessing to the amputation of Gabrielle's arm, Bob Bowen appeared before a justice of the peace in Lindsay to swear out a charge of first-degree murder against Rock Thériault.



Within days of the charge, Rock was transferred to Millhaven Institution, a maximum-security prison in Kingston, Ontario. One of his first visitors, on November 10, 1989, was renowned Toronto psychiatrist Andrew Malcolm, who had been hired by the Crown because of his trial experience and his knowledge of how individual behavior is transformed when subjected to group pressure.

Malcolm later described the cult leader as "a most unusual and intriguing man" with a higher than average intelligence and a belief in himself as a righteous leader. Before his arrest his behavior "was quite often belligerent, arrogant, histrionic and self-centered," but in prison "he is restrained and intense and he gives no indication of his potential for violent and sadistic acts."

The psychiatrist's preliminary finding was that Rock suffered from a "constellation" of mental illnesses, probably including sexual sadism. Many of his symptoms fit the classic definition of what doctors call the narcissistic personality disorder: a grandiose sense of self-importance; preoccupation with fantasies of unlimited success, power, brilliance, beauty or ideal love; exhibitionism; exploitation of others; lack of empathy toward others, including an inability to appreciate the distress of those who are seriously ill; and a propensity for relationships that alternate between extremes of idealization and denigration.

Nevertheless, Malcolm wrote, his initial impression was that Rock was fit to stand trial. "It would seem, at this point, that his mental state was not one that would render him incapable of appreciating the nature and quality of his acts or of knowing that these acts were wrong from a legal point of view."



In contrast to his speedy plea of guilty in the arm-hacking case, Rock was in no hurry to be brought to justice for the murder of Solange Boilard. A preliminary hearing in the case opened in Lindsay on November 19, 1990, and lasted ten days. Gisèle, Gabrielle, Claude and Josée were subpoenaed to testify against Rock; even though he was in handcuffs in the prisoner's box, each felt cowed by his pres-

ence and had trouble looking at him. To demonstrate the accused's continuing hold over his followers, the Crown also called Nicole, Chantal and Francine. The three women smiled sweetly on the stand but declined to criticize their leader. After each of them testified, they turned to the judge and asked for permission to kiss their husband. The requests were denied.

On December 18, Judge Claude Paris committed Rock to trial on the lesser charge of second-degree murder, concluding that there was insufficient evidence to suggest that the killing was premeditated.



While the murder case worked its way through the courts, Rock's legal-aid lawyer, Julian Falconer of Toronto, launched an appeal of the convictions and twelve-year prison sentence for Rock's repeated mutilations of Gabrielle. "When an accused shows up at a bail hearing, pleads guilty and gets twelve years, one has to question his ability to comprehend what he was doing," Falconer told reporters. Rock, of course, had known exactly what he was doing. Still, it wouldn't have helped to admit that the real reason he had copped a plea was to prevent investigators from discovering the truth about Solange's death, which had remained a secret for more than a year.

In a judgment dated September 15, 1992, a panel of three judges from the Ontario Court of Appeal dismissed Rock's bid to overturn his convictions. But the court reduced his sentence on the Lavallée crimes from twelve years to ten, praising Rock's "genuine remorse and concern for the victim." (When Malcolm had asked Rock about the amputation, the cult leader claimed falsely that he had received surgical training in a funeral home in

Thetford Mines. "He insisted that although he was very drunk at the time the procedure was carried out, he nevertheless acted effectively enough to save the woman's life." There was no sign of remorse.) Based on the shorter sentence, Rock would be eligible for full, unsupervised parole on October 10, 1993—four years to the day after his guilty plea.



All things considered, things were going rather well for Rock. There was even a pretty good chance that Falconer could knock the second-degree murder charge down to manslaughter by emphasizing that his client had been drunk at the time of the "operation." If that happened, Rock would be out on the street within two or three years.

But the cops had one last weapon in their arsenal. Diligently, Bowen had compiled an exhaustive file on the major injuries sustained by each of the commune members. In some cases, he interviewed the victims four or five times, taking dozens of photographs of their scars. Those who were still loyal to Rock, like Nicole Ruel, refused to cooperate with the investigation, so Bowen subpoenaed their prison medical records. In the end, he cataloged eighty-four attacks Rock had committed against his followers since the cult had moved to Ontario in 1984. Bowen and his superior, Detective Inspector Bob Adams of the OPP criminal investigations branch in Toronto, were hoping to use the 277-page brief to have Rock declared a dangerous offender. A successful application would keep Rock behind bars indefinitely, with no automatic entitlement to parole.

When Falconer got wind of the evidence that Bowen had compiled, he decided it was time to make a deal. His client would plead guilty to the second-degree murder charge in return for a com-

mitment that the Crown would not press charges on any of the other criminal acts that had come to light during the three-year police investigation. That would force them to drop the dangerous offender application. Not insignificantly, a guilty plea would also ensure that most of the details of Rock's sordid behavior over the years never entered the public record.



Rock's day in court was on January 18, 1993, before Justice R.C. Desmarais in a small Kingston, Ontario, hearing room. Gone was the thick black beard and mane of scraggly hair. Wearing a grey, double-breasted suit and wire-rimmed aviator glasses, a neatly-trimmed Rock hobbled into court on crutches—made necessary, he said, because of a hip injury. Crown Attorney James Stewart read into the record a fifteen-page summary of Rock's commune career and the circumstances surrounding Solange's death. As a history of the defendant's criminal behavior it left much to be desired, omitting, for example, all but the most cursory references to post-mortem atrocities. Even so, Falconer had exacted a promise from Stewart that the Crown would not file the document itself in court or distribute copies of it to journalists.

Judge Desmarais asked Rock if he had anything to say before he was sentenced. Moses rose, puffed up his chest and, speaking in French, gave one of the best performances of his life.

> **Distinguished lawyers, members of the court, Your Honor. These past three years of incarceration have induced me to do a complete about-face on the storm of unusual behavior in my inner self. It is with the good**

faith of my inner vibrations that I come before you.

I recognize that the justice system fulfilled its duty by placing [me] behind bars. Over several years, I made of myself an odious character, an incontestable master compelled undetectably by my own will, [by] the oddities and debaucheries of my way of thinking into which I surreptitiously mixed love, hate, religion, labor, alcohol and violence in my body's helpless state. I nourished my soul with the follies of grandeur.

I have inflicted on myself mental wounds whose invisible scars I will carry for the rest of my life. Some of these scars will remain particularly vivid, such as the ones created when I carried out the folly of my fury: traumatizing, mutilating and inflicting suffering on the members of my entourage, and most particularly the events that led to the premature death of Solange Boilard. I made a criminal of myself.

Allow me to plead for clemency for those who may have put themselves at risk before the law—and society—by going to live in the slavery of that hell. I was the leader of that commune, and I take full responsibility for all the misdeeds committed during its existence. . . .

With dignity and a new integrity I will serve whatever sentence the court deems suitable.



The sentence was life, with no parole for ten years.

Two of Rock's commune disciples were in court that day, sitting on opposite sides of the room. One was Francine Laflamme, as much in love with her

master as she had been for the past fifteen years. The other was Gabrielle Lavallée, wearing a stainless steel right arm. Now living in Toronto, she had spent two years in therapy, attending lectures at the Jungian Institute and reading books on psychology, cults and mind control.

Gabrielle couldn't believe that Rock had got off so lightly. She now wanted to see him sent to prison for the rest of his days—with absolutely no chance of parole. He was a danger to society, a hopeless case. "When I saw him come in on his crutches, I had to laugh," she said later. "Once again he was putting on a great act."

Still, as she sat on a hard wooden bench near the back of the courtroom, Gabrielle once again experienced the power of Moses.

"Twelve years ago when I met him I felt the same thing—a very strong power. In that courtroom, it was like a light coming from him, even through my chest, and I was even pushed back a few inches by a force. But then I just gave it back to him and said, 'Hey, I'm no longer yours.' "

CHAPTER 23

1999

From the time he declared himself Moses in 1978 until his arrest at gunpoint eleven years later, Rock Thériault had alternately charmed and tortured a group of confused young adults from small-town Quebec. He disfigured every one of them emotionally and physically, yet they repaid his brutality with adulation and sacrifice. Solange Boilard sacrificed her life.

What could society have done to stop it? The short answer is not much.

The fact is that in a democratic society, which values individual freedom and takes pride in its tolerance of diversity, adults must be allowed to make their own choices. If some choose to surrender their independence to a self-styled prophet and authoritarian master, there is little that anyone can do about it. Just as some people have an insatiable lust for power, others display an instinctive wish for submission. Freedom for them is a burden, a threat to happiness rather than a cherished objective.

Of course, society does have a right to intervene when the members of such groups become a danger to themselves or to others. Yet by their very nature, apocalyptic cults shield themselves from the out-

side world. Even when the authorities *do* suspect abuses, it is rarely possible to delve beneath the cloak of secrecy.

In Rock's case, the authorities did intervene forcefully on two occasions: after the death of baby Samuel Giguère and the castration of Guy Veer; and again when the Kawartha-Haliburton Children's Aid Society seized fourteen commune children in 1985. In both instances, Rock's widespread abuses remained hidden from the public because the only witnesses were the cult members themselves, who refused to speak ill of their leader. Even Maryse Grenier, who had left the group and voluntarily gave evidence to the CAS, was too afraid to cooperate in a criminal investigation that might have led to charges of child abuse against Rock. After regaining custody of her eldest daughter, she was unwilling even to speak to the police.

Another event that might have shed light on Rock's domination of the group was the death of Gabrielle's baby in January 1985, after having been left unattended in a wheelbarrow outside when the temperature was minus 10°C. Although the coroner, Dr. Al Lackey, ruled that the infant had succumbed to Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, his finding remains controversial. Privately, some more senior members of the provincial coroners' office say that an inquest should have been held and Rock and his followers ordered to testify about conditions at the commune. In the summer of 1993, the coroner's office was reviewing the case to determine whether there were sufficient grounds to file charges against Rock.

At the very least, an inquest would have focussed more public attention on Moses and his bizarre activities. So would the release of Judge Luçien Beaulieu's eighty-three-page ruling in the 1987 Crown

wardship hearing. Under Ontario's Child and Family Services Act, it is an offense to make public any information that might reveal the identities of children or parents who are involved in a Family Court action. But surely it would have been possible to release the document with the names of the children deleted. On balance, it is hard to believe that the ban on publication served the public interest.



The toll of Rock's eleven-year fury is still being counted. Most of his followers have gone underground, not simply because they are frightened for their physical safety but because they desperately want to put their experiences behind them. They maintain unlisted phone numbers and have limited contact with each other as they piece together what remains of their shattered lives.

Jacques Giguère, who was sentenced to five years in prison for his part in Gabrielle's amputation, served twenty-two months at Millhaven and was released on parole in the summer of 1991. During the first year of his prison term he stayed faithful to Moses, even cleaning his toilet and making sandwiches for him. The turning point came when Jacques realized that he didn't know why he was behind bars. "I started thinking for myself. I didn't depend on him for food, clothing or sleep anymore. The prison took care of that." Slowly he regained his psychological distance from Rock—and at one point even fantasized about killing him. He also read about the Big Bang theory of creation and abandoned his belief in God. Jacques is now recuperating with family members in a small town near Ste.-Marie. He has a girlfriend and is trying to re-establish a friendship with his former wife, Maryse

Grenier, who works in a bank and is raising their three children.

Marise Lambert returned to school after fleeing the Burnt River commune and today is a secretary for a Quebec engineering firm. In March 1991 she won custody of her youngest child, who had not yet been adopted when she left the commune. Together with her new boyfriend, she is renovating a house in the Montreal area.

Josée Pelletier was pregnant at the time she left Rock in the spring of 1989. After staying at her mother's home near Plessisville for a few weeks, she found an apartment in Drummondville, Quebec. When the police interviewed her later that year, she was raising her baby boy on welfare. She has since applied for financial support from Ontario's Criminal Injuries Compensation Board.

To this day, Claude Ouellette finds it painful to discuss his short-lived "marriage" to Solange Boilard and Rock's decision to take her away from him. The adoptive parents of Simon, the child Claude had with Solange, occasionally bring the boy to Montreal to visit him. According to Claude, his son is rebellious and often gets in trouble at school. Claude still agonizes over the conditions in which the boy spent his early years. "The children suffered very much, especially those who weren't Rock's. My little boy got hurt a lot. When there wasn't much food, my son looked like those African children you see on television with bloated stomachs. I just hope he can pull himself out of it." As for Rock, Claude hopes he "rots in jail for the rest of his days."

Gabrielle Lavallée lives in Toronto and has written a book on her years with Rock, which was published in French in the fall of 1993. Not long after her escape from the commune, she wrote to the

couple who adopted her ten-year-old daughter and asked to see her. The parents agreed, and Gabrielle now visits the girl frequently. She supports herself with regular payments from the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board, which awarded her "a substantial sum" as a result of the mutilation she suffered. "I'm lucky to be alive and sane," she says.

Gisèle Tremblay lives in a small apartment in a southern Ontario town and has held a job continuously since the summer of 1989. Not long after Rock's arrest she obtained a gun license. Terrified that he will one day get out of prison and seek revenge after her for revealing Solange's murder to the police, she keeps a rifle in her bedroom and says that she would not hesitate to use it in self-defense. "Every day I realize more and more how terrible our life was. The hardest thing for me to face is that I gave up my children. I feel guilty about everything." Now officially divorced from Rock, she has few friends and virtually no social life, preferring to spend her spare time quietly at home. She sees her parents, who are in their seventies, several times a year. In the last few years, she and her mother have become good friends.

More than anything, Gisèle lives in hope that she will one day see her children again—especially Jeremiah, the only one she actually raised, since the others were seized within days of their birth. In 1991, she hired a lawyer to negotiate visiting rights to Jeremiah, but the boy's adoptive family wanted nothing to do with her. In contrast, the family did allow *Toronto Sun* reporter Alan Cairns to visit and interview the boy, now in his early teens. Gisèle and the Children's Aid social workers in Lindsay were appalled by the resulting two-page spread in April 1993, titled "The Devil's Son."

"I was so upset when I saw the article I had to

take a day off work," Gisèle said. "All I want is to see my son. It's the only reason I stay here instead of going back to my home in Quebec. If I could just talk to him for five minutes and tell him that I love him, I would happily give up the rest of my life."



Three of Rock's wives remain as devoted to him as ever.

After Francine Laflamme left the commune, on the night of Gabrielle's amputation, she headed to her mother's house in Plessisville. A few weeks later, she found an apartment in Longueuil and applied for welfare. When Bob Bowen arrived to interview her on October 19, 1989, she described the commune leader's drunken attacks on his followers and showed the officer a scar left by a knife wound to her left hip. Nevertheless, she said she continued to love Rock and would go back to him without hesitation if he stopped drinking.

Within six weeks of that encounter, Francine moved to Kingston to be near her master. Living on welfare, she began to visit Rock twice a week in prison and gave birth to a son in January 1990. The local Children's Aid Society swiftly took the boy into custody and placed him with the same couple who had adopted Francine's first two children.

On October 10, 1990, Nicole Ruel was released on parole from a women's prison in Brampton, Ontario. She went immediately to Kingston and moved in with Francine.

On February 8, 1991, Chantal Labrie was released from the same facility. She, too, joined Francine. As a condition of their parole, neither Chantal nor Nicole was permitted to have any contact with Rock for three years from the dates they left prison. Francine, however, was allowed conjugal visits with

Rock in a prison trailer every six weeks. In the summer of 1991 she bore Rock's twenty-eighth child, her fifth.

By then, Francine, Chantal and Nicole had rented three small cottages less than a kilometer from the main gate of Millhaven penitentiary. At Rock's suggestion, they opened a bakery and soon found themselves with a large stable of regular customers, none of whom had any idea of the trio's history. They even attracted favorable publicity from Kingston's respected daily newspaper, *The Whig-Standard.* On July 15, 1992, the paper carried a glowing report of their enterprise:

NEW BAKERY OPENS AT MILLHAVEN FERRY DOCK

By Jack Rafter
***Whig-Standard* Staff Writer**

MILLHAVEN

Meet Chantal Labrie, Francine Laflamme and Nicole Ruel—three young Quebecoises who make up the latest addition to the Millhaven business scene.

They have launched La Petite Bakery and they have done it with a difference.

They have rented several cottages on a property at the west end directly opposite the Amherst Island ferry landing. They have transformed the smaller of the buildings into the bakery proper.

Because the dimensions are just twelve by twenty feet, La Petite seems a fitting name. They live in the other cottages, store supplies in one and, on rainy days, sell bread from one.

Fair days see them outdoors, vending from under a big patio umbrella near the edge of Highway 33. They're open for business Tuesdays through Sundays from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. They have a table at the Bath flea market on Saturdays.

All three women are in their thirties. Chantal is the baker, Francine the owner and Nicole the sales clerk. They lived in Orillia [sic] for the past several years and ran a similar bakery there for part of the time. They sold their wares both door-to-door and at a flea market.

Ms. Labrie said they had good friends in Kingston who had hailed from La Belle Province and urged them to move here. Besides, Ms. Laflamme had lived in Kingston and found the city great and its French-speaking community very friendly and active. So one thing led to another.

"We love it here," said Ms. Ruel with a flourish, "and we want to stay." Ms. Labrie turns out daily batches of fresh white bread on her over-sized, custom-made wood stove. She also makes delicious garlic bread, cracked wheat, raisin and whole wheat bread, buns, squares, pies, muffins, cookies and other pastries.



The bakery continued to thrive until early in 1993, when news reports of Rock's sentencing drew attention to the presence of the three women near Millhaven. Suddenly, the market for their wares dwindled as customers realized that one of the women's "good friends" was a convicted murderer. Before long, the local health inspector paid a visit

and shut the bakery down, citing unsanitary conditions.

Around the same time, Francine placed an order with a local printing shop for a batch of business cards identifying her as Rock's exclusive agent. She told journalists who approached her after Rock's sentencing that an interview with the prisoner would cost ten thousand dollars. One media organization, Montreal radio station CKAC-AM, did agree to pay Francine what she described as "a little bit of money" for an interview, but when prison authorities found out about the deal they barred Rock from having any contact with journalists. A spokesman for the federal Correctional Services commissioner for Ontario, Jacques Bélanger, said that prison officials did not want Rock to be distracted from his voluntary psychiatric treatment. "There's also a lot of concern about the psychological power he has over some of his people. Former members of his sect could still be influenced by things he says."

Francine insists that Rock is "a changed man," and that he should not be held responsible for the abuses he inflicted. She blames the outbreaks of violence on the abuse he suffered as a child, his stomach ailment and the resulting alcoholism. "After a big meal," she said in a January 1993, interview, "he was in so much pain he would fall into a semi-coma. He turned to alcohol to escape this suffering. But because the doctors took out his stomach, the alcohol went directly into his blood and unleashed a violent chemical reaction.

"Everybody talks about Rock the monster. But most of the time he was not drinking and performing his operations. He was a marvelous man who was full of passion, intelligence and originality. He loved to laugh and dance. This is the side people have to get to know."

Although Francine insisted that she, Chantal and Nicole are older and wiser now, the three still call each other by the Biblical names that Rock gave them in 1978—Hogla, Ruth and Debora respectively. They also continue to regard themselves as Rock's wives. "We've been with Rock for sixteen years," Francine explained. "Sure there is still some jealousy and possessiveness, but the other women are not strangers. They are like sisters to me. We each have our own relationship with him and mine pleases me very much. Polygamy exists elsewhere, you know, and it's only in Canada [sic] that the laws do not allow several women to take on the same man's name."

After the bakery closed, Francine gave up her fifth child for adoption. He now lives with three of his brothers in their adoptive home.



Francine's remaining son, Solomon, still lives in the Utah desert with Alex Joseph and his nine wives. A handsome four-year-old with curly brown hair and big, brown eyes, he has no idea that Rock and Francine are his parents. For him, Joanna and Alex are simply Mom and Dad.

Joanna, a graphic designer, believes that individuals get their personalities from their natural parents, rather than from their environment. She's worried how Solomon will turn out. "When he was a toddler he had a doll that was missing an arm. I had to throw it out because I couldn't stand to watch him play with it."

These days, Solomon is a fan of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, and enjoys playing with a set of nunchakas—a martial arts weapon that consists of two wooden clubs joined by a chain. "He's a man's man," Joanna told Paul Kaihla at Big Water in

March 1993. "He can be a bully, and he doesn't have a lot of sympathy for the weak ones in the playground. But he doesn't get picked on, either.

"Sure, I'm worried and I'm going to keep alert. But I believe that I was meant to have this relationship with him, and we're going to see how it turns out."

When Joanna finished speaking, she asked Solomon to go to his bedroom and fetch his favorite book. He returned a few moments later with a child's guide to human anatomy titled *All About the Body*. Sitting beside his adoptive mother on the sofa, he began turning the pages and pointing to illustrations of major organs. "That's the stomach, the lungs, the heart, the appendix," he said with a child's sense of pride and wonder. Joanna was just about to put the book away when Solomon exploded with excitement. "Wait, wait, what's this?" he exclaimed, pointing to a diagram of the small intestines.



The Toronto morgue released Solange Boilard's ashes and the few remaining bones to her family in January 1993. With her father dead and her mother in an old-age home, Gisèle Martineau took responsibility for the burial arrangements.

That same month, a letter arrived from Rock Thériault, full of self-pity and outright lies. Gisèle was revolted by its contents.

> Gisèle,
>
> Dear Madam,
>
> . . . I understand very well the pain that I will cause you in reviving the memory of Our Sister Solange. But please believe my sincerity

that I share this pain with you. You have all my sympathy.

Since the death of Solange, a melancholy has impregnated itself in my being, plunging me often into a bath of tears. My Love Towards Her is Indescribable.

Permit me, I beg you, to open myself up freely. What I will write to you is not meant to offer excuses or extract pity. It is the authentic account of a dramatic life, in which love, religion, alcohol and violence were mixed, forming an explosive existence.

I am from a family in which I was Mistreated and beaten, worse than a dog, from the age of two until fourteen, when my father, having beaten me, threw me out of the house and told me never to set foot in it again.

This violence fermented in me until the age of thirty-five. Then, finding myself under the dependence of a group of people that I kept around me at all times during all sorts of nonsense, I got caught in my own trap. Under intense pressure, my violence blew up. I loved These People from my deepest self, yet ironically it was on them that I allowed the offerings of my violence to descend. For years I was a bestial brute, a barbarian.

Concerning my illicit practice of medicine, I studied at classical college the theories of Hypocrates [sic]. . . . Afterwards I studied this art by correspondence. I was employed by a paramedic team for four years. . . .

To continue, I will pursue the most delicate, sensitive and emotional subject: Solange and myself.

After Solange gave birth to Simon, a delivery which was long and painful but with no major

complications, Solange . . . called me over to Her. I went down on bended knee next to her bed. She grabbed my head between her hands and held me tight to her breast, saying: "I can no longer hold myself back and I must tell you something. I am madly in love with you."

Solange is the wife that I loved above everything and will love for the rest of my life. Solange had an extremely fragile health. In the Gaspé she had pneumonia twice and nearly died. In the years after this She fell six times into a state of hypothermia. You are free to find fault with my diagnosis, but Solange had cirrhosis of the liver, and this is an irrefutable fact. I knew that Solange had been an alcoholic and She remained one until her death. Forgive me for being so crude but in certain circumstances you have to give expression to the true facts.

I feel that you should know the truth of the events. In spite of the bestial brute that I was, I did not kill Solange. I practiced on Her an operation which prompted her premature death. I am the only one responsible, and it makes me guilty in the face of justice. . . . Therefore next January 18, I will present myself before the Judicial tribunal to receive a sentence of twenty-five years. I would never accept that others be punished for what I voluntarily committed. I beg you to realize that I understand the large bruise that you carry around because of her Disappearance.

In the Name of This Simple and Pure Love that We have, one for the other, I will serve my sentence with dignity.

I ask you to forgive me for all the sufferings of the heart that I caused—I beg you. There is

something in my heart which I must ask you: In the name of the Gene in Your Blood, which flows in part in the Heart of My Three Little Girls . . . can you please watch over them?

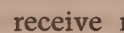
I have had absolutely no news of them for over four years.

I don't know if I dare, but I wish madly that you will accept an invitation to visit me where I am incarcerated. I have a pressing need to reveal some confidences which Solange told me.

If you wish to receive more information about anything, please do not hesitate to call Madame Francine Laflamme.

Your illegitimate Brother-In-Law,
Rock

P.S. I have finally cut off my beard and hair. I am ashamed of having worn this garb for so many years.



Two months later, Gisèle Martineau sat in the parlor of her modest home in Plessisville, where she lives with her husband and two children. As her nineteen-year-old son watched a hockey game on TV nearby, she reminisced about her sister. Now and then, she said, the adoptive parents of Solange's firstborn bring the child to Quebec to see her. But Gisèle has lost track of Solange's other children. She flipped through a diary she used to keep on her sister's life, searching in vain for the children's birth dates.

Then she pulled out a prized keepsake, a letter from the police. Inside were a dozen old photographs of Solange as a child, with her parents and cats. Gisèle's mother had given the snapshots to Solange years earlier. Bob Bowen and his men had

found them at the Burnt River commune during their investigation.

"This is all I have left of my sister," she said, dropping the photos on the table and breaking down in tears.



Within days of his imprisonment at Millhaven, Rock was telling other inmates—who had only scant knowledge of his crimes—that he was a renowned philosopher and brilliant surgeon. He soon toned down his act, perhaps realizing that his claims would undermine his efforts to win early parole. He shaved off his beard and cut his hair. In 1990 he began attending prison English and math classes, telling the teachers that he had a university education. The following year he volunteered to work as a janitor, cleaning offices, exercise areas and common rooms. He also started a vegetable garden, sharing the harvest with other inmates. In 1992 he enrolled in the prison's technical program, studying welding, metal work and woodworking.

A prison progress report dated December 29, 1992, noted that the guards in his cell block "report him to be very pleasant and a hard worker who can work without constant supervision." The only serious complaint against him was for consuming alcohol during a conjugal visit with Francine in May 1991. He was fined five dollars and lost his visiting privileges for three months. Apart from that infraction, however, his behavior was exemplary. "His cooperative attitude, his willingness to want to learn and his lack of institutional charges have prompted discussions with him on transferring to a lower-security institution," the report observed. "He states that he is comfortable here and his common-law

wife lives nearby. However, he will give some thought to a transfer."

During the same week, Rock received an even more glowing appraisal from psychologist Bryan Jones, director of the forensic services program at Kingston Psychiatric Hospital. Jones had visited Rock three times at the request of defense lawyer Julian Falconer to prepare a report for his sentencing on the second-degree murder charge. "My impression is of a man with acute reasoning skills, a very broad variety of interests and a passion for knowledge. . . . He discussed his fascination with the relationships among/between Freud, Jung and Nietzsche and demonstrated what appeared to be a reasonable grasp of the teachings of each."

In conclusion, Jones wrote, "I do not see a protracted period of incarceration as serving any particular purpose in the rehabilitation of this man. Certainly, some period of time is necessary to help him sort out his many psychological problems but there is no evidence of an anti-social or pro-criminal mindset to overcome or be fearful of."

Rock himself, however, has much to fear. After the flurry of news reports about his crimes in the wake of his sentencing, Millhaven officials had to place him in solitary confinement because of threats against his life from other inmates. In April, he was transferred to nearby Kingston Penitentiary, a repository for rapists, child molesters and other criminals whose lives would be at risk in a conventional prison. As a result, Rock is "locked down" in his cell twenty-three hours a day, with one hour of solitary exercise.



No doubt the Millhaven report and Jones' assessment will prove valuable to Rock if and when he

applies for parole. His recent behavior, however, is strikingly at odds with his claim to be a reformed man. Not only does Rock maintain his hold over Francine, Nicole and Chantal—who moved to an apartment near the Kingston Penitentiary as soon as he was transferred there—but he also continues to insist that Solange's death was accidental.

He has also repeatedly attempted to profit from his crimes.

In March 1993, the authors wrote to Rock to request an interview for this book. He sent back a three-page letter suggesting "serious negotiation between both parties." He added: "It is said that freedom has no price and I lost mine voluntarily. However, what has a price are the circumstantial elements throughout my entire life. . . . We are disposed to listen to any serious considerations on your part."

A few days later, Francine Laflamme named Rock's price: twenty-five thousand dollars. For that, Rock would throw in the manuscript of one of the four books he claims to have written in prison—this one titled *The Benefit of Self-Punishment for Criminal Misdeeds.* "He won't do an interview for free," Francine asserted after the authors refused Rock's proposition. "For us, this is a business."

Rock Thériault is eligible to apply for full parole in 1999.

APPENDIX 1

June 11, 1992

F. B. Bagg,
Assistant Crown Attorney,
Ministry of the Attorney General,
Counties of Victoria and Haliburton,
P.O. Box 4000,
440 Kent Street West,
Lindsay, Ontario K9V 5P2.

Dear Mr. Bagg:

Re: R. v. Thériault, Rock.

You asked me to review materials regarding the prosecution of Mr. Thériault. In particular, I was asked to provide an opinion why members of the commune of which Mr. Thériault was involved would stay after they had been allegedly abused by him; why they would keep returning to the commune even though they had been abused; why members of the commune would acquiesce to the accused operating on her; and why other members of the commune would stay and not attempt to prevent the harm to other members.

In preparing this opinion, I reviewed the following materials:

1. Chronology of the events in the commune
2. Synopsis of the events surrounding the death of Solange Boilard
3. Commune history
4. Synopsis of Maryse Lambert and statements
5. Synopsis of Francine Laflamme
6. Statement of Gisèle Tremblay
7. Summary of events by Gabrielle Lavallée
8. Alcohol abuse summary by Lavallée
9. Synopsis of statement of Claude Ouellette
10. Claude Ouellette—Synopsis and statement
11. Videotapes of two witnesses (Gisèle Tremblay and Claude Ouellette)

PSYCHOLOGICAL OPINION:

The concerns to be addressed in this opinion essentially can be collapsed into one primary issue: Why do individuals stay in a relationship, or in this case a commune, if they are being physically threatened or perceive that their life may be in danger? Over the past decade, considerable research has focused on the symptoms and behavior of women who live with abusive partners. I draw a parallel to this literature, for in the present instance, as discussed by Leonore Walker (1989)[1], the circumstances are very similar. That is, there were a number of women who were married to the accused, and their circumstances, as detailed in the evidence, are highly similar to the circumstances of women living with abusive partners. Battered women often describe their abusive partners as having a "Dr. Jekyll/Mr. Hyde" personality. She believes that if she could somehow find a way to help her partner, with whom she has a loving bond, then [the] mean part

[1] Walker, L. E. A. (1989). Psychology and violence against women, *American Psychologist, 44,* 695–702.

of his personality may disappear. Moreover, battered women lose the perceived *ability to escape*; they try to adapt to the aversive situation in an attempt to cope with the unpleasantness and minimize their pain. To get through very disturbing, violent episodes, such persons will distort (in their mind) the situation by minimizing or denying the reality of the circumstances.

Battered women may choose to remain with an abusive partner and accommodate to his many demands, isolating themselves from others who may be able to help them. Often such behavior is misinterpreted as passivity when, in fact, such reactions are adaptive and increase their likelihood of survival. When it is perceived that such coping skills will no longer be enough to protect herself or her children, she usually makes an attempt to escape.

I outline below several points in the literature on battered women, in which there is consensus as to why they remain in such relationships. The current evidence (a) that some left and came back to the commune, (b) some individuals acquiesced to the situation and did not leave, and (c) some individuals were "bystanders" during violent acts and did nothing is all considered in relation to this literature. Below are issues that relate to why individuals stay in such circumstances, accompanied by evidence provided to me in the documents or on videotape that support each of these points.

1. Fear/Perceived Inability to Escape: The primary reason cited as to why women remain in violent relationships is their fear of the perpetrator. Over time, they may begin to habituate to elevated levels of violence, and violent episodes may become so commonplace that persons become unaware of alternatives. As well, such individuals may become quite fearful based on

the reality of what they witness and believe that attempts to escape would be more dangerous.

In the current instance, the evidence provided to this examiner indicated that Mr. Thériault would throw knives at different members of the group, shoot weapons at them or in their direction, cut them or perform minor or major operations on their persons, and similar acts which would invoke fear of Mr. Thériault.

Ms. Gisèle Tremblay Thériault made several statements on her videotape testimony to the police that are relevant to the issue of fear: "Rock said I must obey him"; "In the early days, it was not so bad, Rock hardly drank"; "If you didn't do what Rock said, he drank, and then he took vengeance on her"; "He would slap us, kick us, and punch us. At first, it was not too bad, and I would tough it out. I tried to agree with what Rock said, but there were too many bad things. Rock had formulated in my mind that I must obey him. Rock would stop drinking after I left, and when I returned things were peaceful for two to three months." "I was scared of my husband; when he complained of things in the group, I grew scared. I'd leave and hide, but I'd come back because he was my husband."

Also relevant to the important issue of fear among the members was the evidence indicating that no outside authority became involved to prevent such violence. In other words, there was no one within or outside the commune group to whom an individual can turn in order to seek help. Again, Ms. Tremblay Thériault stated that "we were all like robots. We were afraid of everything. He wanted to get us back, for Rachel. We were all like vegetables." She described how she asked the group to stop Rock from doing things to Rachel's corpse, but no one would speak out or do anything to assist. She then described how she was too

afraid of Rock. He would "kill me because I would leave the camp and return—I was a traitor." "I finally saw the truth, I saw Rock for what he really was." "He (Rock) was a doctor, cook, and looked after us. I couldn't understand why he struck out. When he drank, everything in his head changed." Following the news of the alleged murder of Rachel, Ms. Tremblay Thériault indicated that "to me, my life did not belong to myself." "Rock blamed everyone else for Rachel's death." These statements are highly congruent with the literature on battered women, cited above, and endorse the conclusion that fear and the perceived inability to escape were present among some commune members.

2. Economics: A second documented reason why abused women do not leave abusive relationships is economic dependency and fear of leaving the situation for lack of alternatives. In the current instance, there was considerable evidence provided on the videotapes and in the court documents suggesting such economic dependency. For example, it appears that Mr. Thériault had considerable control over commune members, and that he was the one who organized the commune and was primarily responsible for provision of food and shelter in initial stages of the commune. The members also remained in relative isolation, and therefore had few outsiders with whom to discuss their feelings or concerns as things began to worsen over time. The members apparently became very dependent on Mr. Thériault and were very familiar with his behavior changes. However, they became powerless to oppose him. He apparently maintained his level of control over them by acts of random and unpredictable violence, according to witnesses. Such random acts, such as throwing knives at group members, kept them fearful of any opposition.

3. Self-concept: Individuals may stay in an abusive relationship because their self-esteem is often affected to such a degree that they feel personally responsible for the violence. Often, such individuals believe that the offender is trying to rid them of "Satan" or similar negative personality characteristics, and therefore feel there is some justification for the violence.

Once again, there was considerable evidence in the documents suggesting that this was also the case in the current circumstances. For example, the videotape of Claude Ouellette summarizes approximately 26 injuries that he testified were caused by Rock. A sampling of some of these injuries include being hit with a strap about 200 times (when asked why he would receive the strap, he indicated "it's too difficult to explain—I had sinned against Rock's rules and the rules of God"). In 1989, he received one or two blows from a sledgehammer from one of the women in the group, under Rock's order. He also had pliers applied to his nipples and to his testicles, and had teeth removed, his beard burned, and cuts to his thigh, hands, and arms; and burns to parts of his body. In explaining these injuries, Mr. Ouellette described his "Law of Reciprocity", in which he inferred that Rock did things to members of the group in Rock's attempts to "hunt for Satan" and "to remove bad things or persons". Mr. Ouellette did not feel Rock was crazy, but rather that it was God who was punishing them through Rock. He states that Rock was drunk and the next day he would not remember the acts. Importantly, Mr. Ouellette indicated that Rock would "take care of us afterwards" and "he took good care of my burns".

These explanations, provided by one of the alleged victims, are in keeping with the literature indicating that victims of personal assaults in families and close-knit groups often have very low self-esteem, and believe that they either deserve their injuries or that the

person injuring them was doing so for some "higher reason". In this case, much of the higher reason concerned their belief that Rock was carrying out the will of God, and that whatever he said was the law. The members are willing to sustain personal risk and injury in order to prove their devotion. Mr. Thériault, therefore, became not only a leader in their eyes but a person who was carrying out "God's will."

4. The impact of violence leads to helplessness and social isolation. As noted above, women who are abused in relationships often feel helpless in discussing their problems with others, and other times begin to have fewer and fewer social contacts. Accordingly, they rarely have an opportunity to discuss their situation with others who might question the circumstances or perhaps offer help in stopping the abuse. The literature also indicates that the offenders in such circumstances often exert considerable control over their spouses in an attempt to avoid any contact with others. For example, they will limit their friends, not permit them to leave the house on their own, limit their telephone conversations, and similar methods of control.

In the current circumstances, the evidence presented indicated that this commune was socially isolated and very exclusionary of outsiders. Although some of Rock's actions were described as violent and unpredictable, the members believed that they were powerless to oppose him. Rock apparently maintained his level of control over them by acts of random and unpredictable violence. Such random acts, such as throwing knives at group members, kept them fearful of opposition and afraid to discuss their circumstances even among each other for fear of reprisal. Because they witnessed such reprisal on numerous occasions, this served to reinforce their belief that they must

obey each and every order given by their leader. Thus, the report that they lived with such violence for several years is consistent with a common finding in the literature on battered women: living in a battering relationship leads to a sense of helplessness in leaving the relationship, and an isolation from others. Such psychological outcomes make it even more likely that the offender will continue to have power and control over the individual.

CONCLUSIONS:

Based on the evidence presented, it appears that Mr. Thériault had complete power and control over members of the commune, who became impotent to oppose him. They also state that he kept weapons and would frequently use them in a random fashion, which had the effect of instilling greater fear and unpredictability. Based on the large literature regarding the symptoms and behavior of women who live with abusive partners, it is any opinion that the present circumstances reflect a cycle of violence similar to that of other abused women (and men, although this has been less documented). Mr. Thériault's wives remained with him due to fear and their perceived inability to escape, economic dependency, low self-esteem, and social isolation/helplessness. Because the circumstances changed gradually over several years, and were not consistently harsh or violent, members learned to adapt to unpredictable acts of violence and terror by remaining obedient and passive. As the violence escalated, it appears that issues of personal safety became paramount, and some members sought ways to escape. Such behavior is very understandable in view of the literature on battered women (as well as similar studies of victims of human-made trauma), and accounts for the finding that Mr. Thériault's wives did not resist

or leave the relationship until many years of violence had passed.

I trust that this opinion is helpful to the court, and I remain available for further consultation and clarification.

Sincerely,

David A. Wolfe, Ph.D., ABPP
Registered Psychologist

APPENDIX 2

Correctional Services Canada

Progress Summary

1. FPS Number: 2 4 2 3 4 0 B

2. Family Name: THERIAULT

3. Given Name(s): ROCK

4. Date of Birth: 47/05/16

5. Completing Operational Unit
"J" LIVING UNIT

6. Current Institution or Address
MILLHAVEN

The purpose of this report is to provide information for ROCK THERIAULT'S lawyer Mr. Julian Falconer. This report has been read by ROCK THERIAULT. ROCK THERIAULT had asked that the report be sent to Mr. Julian Falconer.

CASE STATUS

ROCK THERIAULT is a 45 year old inmate serving his first federal sentence of 10 years for aggravated assault

x3 and assault causing bodily harm. He was convicted of aggravated assault x4 and received 12y 0m 0d but this was appealed. The appeal was heard on 92/09/15 and his sentence was changed to aggravated assault x3 and assault causing bodily harm. The sentence was reduced to 10y 0m 0d. His criminal history dates back to 1979 and includes, assault peace officer, cause bodily harm by criminal negligence, cause bodily harm with intent, mischief, assault and obstruct peace officer. The longest previous sentence was 2 years less a day. He was admitted to the Millhaven Transfer Unit on 89/10/17, and was transferred to Millhaven Institution on 89/12/27. There is an outstanding charge of 2nd degree murder at this time.

Summary of Current Institutional Performance

OVERVIEW OF CORRECTIONAL PLAN

ROCK THERIAULT has chosen not to participate in the C.M.S. because of outstanding charges. His S.I.R. scale is +4 which means 2 out of every 3 offenders will not commit an indictable offence after release.

The latest correctional plan was completed on 92/06/18. He was to attend a substance abuse course, his name was to be submitted for a course in the fall of 1992. There have been institutional lockdowns because of problems and as a result of this his name has been submitted for a course which started in January 1993. Interviews have been completed and this course should start in early January. He was to attend a cognitive skills course, his name is on a waiting list at this time. He was to maintain family relationships through available programs at Millhaven Institution. He takes part in Private Family Visits, open visits and socials at the institution with his common-law wife Francine

Laflamme and their son. He is to remain fully employed while at Millhaven Institution, this has been accomplished. He is to remain charge free while at Millhaven Institution, there have been two charges, those will be discussed in the Discipline and Dissociation section. He is to maintain contact with his Case Management Officer Institution and his assigned Correctional Officer II. This is being done.

There are two programs which he should complete, substance abuse and cognitive skills. He is willing to take these programs, however the problem is, there are many inmates and few programs. There is also a problem with delays because of institutional lockdowns and other security problems associated with a maximum security institution. Without these problems there is a strong possibility that these programs would be completed by now.

The substance abuse program is based on a cognitive social learning model and consists of 85 hours of instruction and group exercises in alcohol and drug education, goal setting, problem solving (behavioral and cognitive coping), life area planning, relapse prevention training and individual counselling.

Cognitive Skills program is designed to teach skills that will enable inmates to deal with problems within the institution, with family members, with friends and acquaintances. This is a core component of living skills programming, completion of this program will enable the inmate to take any other living skill programs.

WORK PERFORMANCE

Since approx. 91/01/10 ROCK THERIAULT had been a cleaner in "J" unit. He first started as a cleaner on 1k range. He then was in charge of cleaning offices, cloisters and common rooms. He was also taking care of

incoming cleaning supplies. He does a very good job and if asked to do any other job he does so without question. In addition to cleaning the offices and cloisters (small inmate exercise areas) he started a very large garden. The vegetables were used by himself and other inmates in "J" living unit.

On 92/08/28 he applied for Technical Studies and was accepted. This is a school program which deals with academic work and technical studies such as wood working, welding, metal work, drafting etc. Most students in the school area have just finished an Arts course for a credit, ROCK THERIAULT was one of them. His supervisor in this area reports that he is very easy to get along with, cooperative, and he works well with staff and inmates. They also report that he is willing to learn and is willing to share the knowledge that he has with others.

EDUCATIONAL AND TRAINING

ROCK THERIAULT attended school from Feb. 1990 to Jan. 1991. During this time he was involved in ABE and cell study. In Jan. 91 he stopped going to school to become a cleaner in "J" unit. His instructors report that there were no problems in the school. SCAT testing results were GR 7 verbal and GR 10 math. He claims to have a university education, this is not shown in the SCAT tests, however French is his first language and this could explain the SCAT scores.

PROGRAM PARTICIPATION

ROCK THERIAULT appears to be very interested in attending courses that will benefit him. The substance abuse course and the cognitive skills course have been explained in detail to him. He wishes to attend both. The Substance Abuse course has interviewed him for

the course that will start in January of 1993. Final selection of inmates that will be attending will be made at that time. The cognitive skills course will make selections sometime in January, his name has been placed on that waiting list also.

FAMILY SUPPORT SYSTEMS

He has open visits with his common law wife Francine Laflamme and their son. He was involved in the Private Family Visit program with his common law wife, but this was cancelled because of a charge of consuming an intoxicant while on a Private Family Visit on 91/05/13. The open visits as well as the Private Family Visits have been reinstated. Rock Theriault, his common-law wife and their son have had a Private Family Visit on 91/10/03 this was without incident and they have had a Private Family Visit approximately every six weeks since that date. There have been no other reported problems. His common law wife visits on a regular basis, at least twice a week and they stay in touch by telephone.

LEISURE ACTIVITY

Although not a native, ROCK THERIAULT attends the Native Brotherhood and French Cultural Groups. He spends time in his cell reading. He developed an interest in art and is receiving some assistance from other inmates. He has been writing a book on philosophy, at this time he is translating this book to English. He also walks in the yard.

MEDICAL AND LEGAL STATUS

ROCK THERIAULT is a Canadian Citizen. He has an outstanding charge of 2nd degree murder which has not been dealt with at this time.

He is having some problems with his diet, there is a problem with his hip and there have been some minor problems with his heart medication, these are being addressed at the institution.

TRANSFERS/CONDITIONAL RELEASE

He was admitted to the Millhaven Transfer Unit on 89/10/17, and was transferred to Millhaven Institution on 89/12/27. He was placed in "J" living unit population. There have been no requests for transfer to a lower security.

DISCIPLINE AND DISSOCIATION

Information in his Discipline and Dissociation indicate the following:

He was placed in segregation on 90/04/06 for having a homemade brew in his cell. He was returned to his unit on 90/04/12 as the charge was dismissed by the Institutional Disciplinary board.

He was charged 91/05/13 with consuming an intoxicant while he was on a Private Family Visit with his wife. He was fined $5.00, his Private Family Visits and open visiting privileges were suspended, however they were reinstated in Aug. 1991. He has completed several Private Family Visits after they were reinstated and there have been no problems reported.

On 92/04/25 he was charged with having his cell window covered. This was a minor charge most of the inmates in the unit had their cell windows covered on this evening. He was warned and advised.

PSYCHOLOGICAL/PSYCHIATRIC PROGRAM INVOLVEMENT

ROCK THERIAULT has seen a psychologist on 90/04/18 with respect to his suitability for a Private Family Visit. He was seen on 90/05/01 because of his category one conviction. Although not seen on a regular basis he has seen a psychologist on 91/05/30, this was in response to having his Private Family Visiting privileges suspended. . . .

OVERALL ASSESSMENT

ROCK THERIAULT has been at Millhaven Transfer Unit since 89/10/07 and at Millhaven Institution since 89/12/27. He has shown a cooperative attitude towards staff and has caused very few problems. He has spent a good deal of this time working within the living unit and this enables the Correctional Officers to interact with him on a daily basis. Officers report him to be very pleasant and a hard worker who can work without constant supervision.

He has spent just over 3 years at Millhaven Transfer Unit and Millhaven Institution, during this time he has been charged and convicted twice in institutional court. The first on 91/05/13 was for being under the influence, which is a serious charge. There have not been any repeats of this type of behavior and 19 months have passed. The second on 92/04/25 which was for having his window covered which is a minor charge. This record of offences (or lack of offences) is very good. He has shown that he can live in a maximum security institution while incurring few charges.

He states that he is interested in programs and is willing to participate in them. Hopefully programming can start this January with the start of the substance abuse program. His cooperative attitude, his willing-

ness to want to learn and his lack of institutional charges have prompted discussions with him on transferring to a lower security institution. He should be able to function very well in a medium security institution. He states that he is comfortable here and his common law wife lives close by, however he will give some thought to a transfer.

ROCK THERIAULT has stated that he is interested in his rehabilitation. He appears to be interested in dealing with the problems that he has caused and in looking within himself to deal with these in a constructive manner. He seems to be amenable to the rehabilitation process and is pointing himself in a positive direction.

Completed by ORR D.C.

Date 92/12/29

APPENDIX 3

December 24, 1992

To: Mr. Julian Falconer
Barrister
11 Prince Arthur Avenue
Toronto, Ontario M5R 1B2

From: G.B. Jones, Ph.D., C.Psych
Director
Regional Forensic Services Program
Kingston Psychiatric Hospital

Ass't Professor of Psychiatry and Psychology
Queen's University

RE: Mr. Rock Thériault

REFERRAL

Mr. Falconer contacted me by telephone and requested that I meet Mr. Thériault with a view to formulating an opinion, bearing on the issue of the rehabilitation of this man. Mr. Falconer subsequently provided me with a facsimile of the Statement of Facts on a Plea of Guilty to Second Degree Murder, by way of background.

INTERVIEW

I met with Mr. Thériault at the Millhaven Institution in a private interview area removed from his living space. He appeared at all times well rested and well oriented.

I advised Mr. Thériault of the purpose of my report, namely, that at the request of Mr. Falconer I would attempt to formulate an opinion on issues related to Mr. Thériault's potential and desire for rehabilitation and the progress he may have already made in that direction.

I met with Mr. Thériault on three occasions for a total of approximately 4½ hours.

OPINION

Mr. Thériault appears to be a *very* bright man. Although I conducted no formal testing, aside from a very coarse memory screen, my impression is of a man with acute reasoning skills, a very broad variety of interests and a passion for knowledge. We discussed, at some length, Mr. Thériault's various vocations since his teens, and although I have no confirmatory information as to the accuracy of his reports, my own general knowledge of these areas confirms that Mr. Thériault knows what he is talking about. For example, we discussed Mr. Thériault's interest in health science. He reports having been a veterinarian's assistant as a teen, later an ambulance attendant, and finally as operating a private 'holistic' health care centre. While acknowledging that this path may have, ultimately, led Mr. Thériault to the situation he now finds himself in, it is also true that he has a quite considerable knowledge in this area, especially of physiology and 'practical' or 'field' medicine. Similarly, he has a keen

interest in psychiatry and, particularly, analysis, which he freely admits is partly because he knows he must better understand himself. He discussed his fascination with the relationships among/between Freud, Jung, and Nietzsche and demonstrated what appeared to be a reasonable grasp of the teachings of each. I had no sense that this was a particularly new interest area for Mr. Thériault, nor that he adopted it solely for my benefit.

Mr. Thériault reports being an active participant in an ongoing business venture (a bakery) with partners in the local Millhaven community, and it is a matter of record that he has had other business experience. He also indicates previous experience with woodworking and is particularly pleased that he is once again, within Millhaven, involved in both this activity and, apparently, also in fine art. Apparently, Mr. Thériault has enjoyed a great deal of satisfaction from his painting activities, something he has dabbled in since adolescence. He is receiving instruction from a Queen's University professor who comes to Millhaven. Mr. Thériault relates that he has also enjoyed giving some of his art away for others to enjoy, and that he has also been influential in having two of his fellow inmates find some enjoyment in learning about painting. Mr. Thériault and I discussed at some length the psychological benefit of the creative arts and he explained that for him, painting serves as a 'good' way of letting his emotions have expression. Indeed, art therapy has long been recognized as an effective technique for teaching persons with 'low expressed emotion' to learn how to gain awareness of their own inner experience. Such persons, in the absence of this skill, may be prone to experiencing difficulties with emotional control because they may not be aware of their own emotional ability and factors that give rise to it. Finally,

Mr. Thériault advised me that he is currently writing a book and that he has, in fact, written another (at least one other) and that this was published and sold several thousand copies.

Based on this information, much of which could be checked, and Mr. Thériault's presentation, there is little doubt that he does not lack for skills or knowledge that could serve him well in the community upon release. Indeed, Mr. Thériault appears to be somewhat of a 'renaissance man' whose major difficulty may be in finding a way to comfortably integrate into something other than a community of scholars. Perhaps with a less disturbed childhood and adolescence, and more opportunity, Mr. Thériault would have found himself in just such a community by now, rather than the one he is in.

In summary on this point, it would not appear that the normal sort of vocational rehabilitation is a primary need of this man, however, there is every reason to believe that he would not be successful in integration into society once again, without considerable psychological rehabilitation. Mr. Thériault appears to understand this, as evidenced by his reading extensively about matters related to early childhood experience and various theorists in psychotherapy. Nevertheless, in my view, he requires extensive counselling/therapy in order to resolve conflicts arising from his early abused life experience, his lack of opportunity in the face of what appears to be considerable ability and, perhaps, help with the simple burden of being an extraordinary person in an ordinary world. Of course, considering my very limited formal assessment, it is possible that my opinion regarding Mr. Thériault's level of ability is somewhat overinflated. My sense is otherwise. In any event, he gives the impression of being verbal, 'psychologically minded', and

motivated, qualities arguing for the successful outcome of psychotherapy.

In our discussion of the need for psychological help, Mr. Thériault agreed with my observation that his current environment was, somehow, almost ideal for him at this time in his rehabilitation. Like a religious ascetic, Mr. Thériault is able to take advantage of the psychological and social isolation, and to look inward by way of reflection and study. To augment this with professional assistance would, however, make the exercise much more useful. Whereas vocational rehabilitation may not be essential to this man's successful re-integration to society, in my view, psychological rehabilitation is.

Mr. Thériault seems genuinely motivated to make himself over into a person that he, his children, and his parents, can finally be proud of. He relates that his parents, or at least his father who Mr. Thériault describes as a violent alcoholic, abused him and that they now feel the guilt of the effect this appears to have had on their son. Mr. Thériault is worried that his mother and father are "gonna die with this in their heart" and he is determined to make something of himself to prove that these early years can be forgotten. Mr. Thériault says that his incarceration has given him the opportunity to get away from the thousand things he had on his mind before, and let him concentrate on what caused his life to go the way it did and the terrible effects he has had on others. He relates that he is doing this by way of study, introspection, good deeds to other inmates, and by writing a second book which he has, apparently, been asked to write by some publisher. Mr. Thériault believes that the publisher is motivated by sensationalism. Nevertheless he says he is going to take the opportunity and use it to "let know to society I used to be that type of angry, I

need to show you how there can be some kind of a guy like me, how it's possible to be honest and . . . . how to re-establish myself and the truth of the human being I am". He is determined to show that a man can do terrible things and still have goodness in him.

Mr. Thériault's first step in this rehabilitation process has been to accept his guilt and whatever sentence the court may impose upon him. Indeed, Mr. Thériault feels that he needs to "take account" of his mistakes and that only by doing so, that is by serving his sentence, can he begin his new life. Mr. Thériault expressed that to somehow avoid his punishment would greatly disturb him and stand in the way of his making amends within himself and starting "my new life". Mr. Thériault stated, "I have a deep regret for those I have hurt; for me a big scar; I have a big shame" but "now I am getting older and I am happy".

Alcohol has clearly played a very big part in the tragedy of Mr. Thériault's life. Mr. Thériault knows that; but like so many others, has no real plan on how to keep away from it. He states that a diabetic condition now precludes drinking, and that he has tried to drink once during a 'trailer visit', but was sick. He also states that alcohol is commonly available within Millhaven, which seems likely, but that he hasn't been tempted. He says "it's not that I just say I'm never going to touch that alcohol, it's just that me I don't need it". This may be true, but the community outside presents different stressors and situations, and only some manner of formal, professional intervention and community support system seems likely to offer long-term benefit. Towards this end, Mr. Thériault admits that "I need to reinforce knowledge", and he has had two preliminary interviews with professional staff within his institution, hoping that he will be accepted into an alcohol rehabilitation program scheduled to begin in

early January. The existence of this program, and Mr. Thériault's attempt to be admitted to it, is confirmed by Mr. Thériault's Classification Officer, Mr. David Orr. The program is of 12 weeks duration and is run by Dr. L. Lightfoot at Millhaven. It apparently adopts a 'risk management' approach to abstention, an approach strongly supported by the literature in terms of long term follow-up data. This is the same technique used on my Forensic Service in the management of a variety of problem behaviours. In my opinion, if Mr. Thériault successfully completes this program, and participates in the follow-up phases, his likelihood of abstaining from alcohol will be significantly improved.

Mr. Thériault continues to have community supports. He reports being engaged in a small bakery business with two friends now living in the surrounding community, and that he maintains contact with his legal wife and also some other friends. It is not clear the extent to which he continues a relationship with his parents.

SUMMARY

Mr. Rock Thériault appears to be a very bright, inquisitive and sensitive man. He relates a very disturbed childhood and adolescence, with an alcoholic father and both physical and psychological abuse. He describes a reasonable adjustment until his late twenties when he becomes increasingly preoccupied with philosophical themes and by which time he was abusing alcohol with violent effect on both himself and others. His evidently charismatic style, breadth of knowledge and skills, and ability to organize others led, ultimately, to the development of a 'commune' which became increasingly isolated from the outside world, further de-realizing Mr. Thériault's existence. All

these factors resulted, finally, in the death of one of the members of the community.

Since the index event, Mr. Thériault has looked inward in an effort to understand how all this could have come about. He has not externalized the blame; he has not attempted to manipulate the system into excusing his behaviour. Mr. Thériault is busy with trying to make something out of the rest of his life and he sees the correctional system as the perfect place to do it. He studies in a variety of areas, writes extensively, and spends long hours trying to understand and then resolve the conflicts within him that have come to this terrible result. He has made considerable progress, in my view, towards this end but he must have long-term consistent professional help if he is to ultimately succeed. This help must be in the form of psychotherapy to address his psychological difficulties, and counselling to assist with alcohol abuse. Finally, he will require assistance with the practical matter of how he is to 'fit in' to the real world outside. This does not so much need to take the form of skills development or job search skills, but assistance with focusing on one area or another of those available to him, which will provide him with the inner satisfaction he so desperately requires to make his life worthwhile. Like many others in his position, Mr. Thériault aspires to helping others avoid the same situation he finds himself in. Unlike many others, however, he probably has the ability to do it.

I do not see a protracted period of incarceration as serving any particular purpose in the rehabilitation of this man. Certainly, some period of time is necessary to help him sort out his many psychological problems but there is no evidence of an anti-social or pro-criminal mind set to overcome or be fearful of. Although there are always concerns about the potential for reoffending, I would see Mr. Thériault as having the

attributes normally associated with good response to treatment and as likely to benefit most from a gradual, supported, and controlled re-integration to society, paired with ongoing psychotherapeutic intervention.

I trust this report will be of assistance to Mr. Thériault and the Court.

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He was a charismatic junior high school dropout who became one of the most notorious cult leaders in North American history. Living on a wilderness commune with his followers, his eight "wives" and their twenty-six children, Rock Thériault renamed himself Moses and set himself up as absolute ruler of his tiny community.

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